University of Alberta

The Experience of Youths with Physical Disabilities in Sport and Physical Activity Settings

by

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Geraldine and Cecil, who have endlessly supported my journey of learning both while I was enrolled in school at *home*, and from across the miles throughout my educational career. I am eternally grateful for your love and encouragement, especially during the many *defining moments* we have endured together over these past few years. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for being my biggest fans.

Abstract

The purposes of this study were two-fold: to learn and interpretatively describe the holistic *place* experiences of 5 youths with physical disabilities by collecting narratives through the use of individual interviews and a drawing activity, and; to learn the meaning and significance of physical activity, sport, recreation, leisure and/or exercise to each of the five youths within their overall life story. Participants were 4 females and 1 male between the ages of 15 to 18 years. Following a narrative analysis and analysis of narratives, four topical areas emerged: swimming, specialized activity programs, school physical education, and outdoor places. The findings imply the importance for youths with physical disabilities to build attachments to places affording physical activity through need satisfaction of security, social affiliation, and creative expression and exploration.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Coming to the question

This project was designed such that I would have the opportunity to learn about the various life experiences of a group of youths with disabilities whom I volunteered to work with in a specialized sport program for two years. I became fascinated with how they experience sport and physical activity settings and with what their participation means within their lives as a whole. Before I divulge how I learned from these youths through interpretive inquiry, it is important for me to outline the forestructure (Ellis, 1998a) I self-consciously brought to my research so that the reader is aware of the lenses from which I undertook this interest.

I have been involved in sports, physical activity and recreation from as early in my life as I can remember. My summer childhood days were spent at our family cottage where I lived in my bathing suit and spent lots of time building tree forts with my older brother Chad, or feeding apples to our neighbor's cows… that is, when I wasn't snorkeling or diving for fresh-water clams! My mom would always sit down on the wharf with a lawn chair and her book – looking up to watch Chad and I swim and play on the floating raft my father made for us. I also used to have an old bicycle at the cottage that I rode on the long winding driveway back and forth to the lake and over hills sprinkled with acorns and pine needles along the way.

At home in the city, I was involved in all sorts of community activities like tap dancing, jazz, and figure skating in addition to the many school teams I played on. I played volleyball and ran cross-country straight through from grade 3 to grade 12, and

was fortunate to be chosen to play on various other school and provincial teams during my school years like soccer, basketball, softball and rugby. Being active and playing sports was a large part of my life then and still is now.

When I graduated from grade 12 in Nova Scotia, I naturally chose to take an undergraduate degree in human kinetics; the study of human movement. All of the different areas to specialize in under the umbrella of sport studies intrigued me, but it wasn't until I enrolled in a class that was aimed at learning sport strategies for special populations that I truly discovered my passion. The creative license to dream anything in order to help someone with special needs participate in activities called to me. Within the context of adapted physical activity, I have been able to draw on my life experiences with sport in order to facilitate others in creating their own experiences in sport and physical activity. Instilling the value of physical activity, and providing the opportunity to embrace the life-long gifts that being active can offer has not yet disappointed me. All of my experiences involving people with special needs have convinced me that I am one of the lucky ones in life who enjoys the benefits of a job that doesn't feel like work.

When I was accepted to a Masters degree program that specialized in Adapted Physical Activity and found out the program didn't have an applied component that would incorporate working with people with disabilities, I sought out volunteer opportunities to satisfy my interest. I began volunteering two nights a week for a specialized disability sport program for adolescents with physical disabilities. It incorporated both a weight training component and a sport skills component where the youths learned about different sports, and how to adapt the sports to meet their needs. I

really enjoyed the atmosphere of the program, and being there with the kids helped me to remember why I enjoyed the field so much.

When the program first started for the year, some of the kids that came were a little timid and not sure of what to expect of themselves. They didn't have a sense of what they were capable of physically, and I suspected this was in part due to the fact that others in their lives may not have expected much from them either. The kids were consistent in coming to the program and were open to try new ideas for adapting an array of sport skills for themselves. Over the span of a few weeks, I saw them become more comfortable with each other, as well as with all of the volunteers. Often times, we found ourselves laughing together at someone's joke, or listening to each other tell the group about little parts of our weeks at school.

One night in particular really caught my attention. The events that unfolded that night and in the weeks that followed have helped to lead me to the research described in this thesis. I was volunteering during one of the weight training nights with a girl that I especially liked working with. She was a quiet girl in general, and worked on her weight program without much difficulty, but was never one to try a weight she knew would be a bit harder to lift. She wasn't comfortable with challenging herself, and any time I suggested a challenge, she always said to me that she knew she couldn't do it and wanted to stay with the amount of weight she was at. I always felt that she did not give her abilities enough credit because *I* thought she could do it, but I wasn't too sure how I could likewise convince *her*. I encouraged her, but I didn't want to push her too much and end up pushing her away from trying altogether. One night she came in and I began encouraging her to challenge herself the way I often did, fully expecting to hear exactly

the same response that I heard every other week. To my surprise, she exceeded what I asked her to do, and asked me to add another five pounds on top of that! I was amazed, excited, and curious all at the same time. I wondered what had changed her mind, and why all of a sudden she believed she could do it.

As the weeks went by, it wasn't just in her that I was noticing a distinct change of attitude. Some of the boys in the program started to try new cardio programs and heavier weights without any prompting by the volunteers. Soon after, two of the youth asked me to develop home stretching programs for them to help improve their flexibility, and one girl asked me for advice about how she might talk to her physical education teacher at school about including her in the weight training program that they do as part of the physical education curriculum. The youths became more and more interested in the program and showed marked improvements every week. Two girls in our program developed such a keen interest in trying new programs and specialized activities that they signed up for a week long recreational camp especially for youths with disabilities that is held in Ottawa every year.

Overall, it made me curious about the changes in their personal lives, their perceptions, or their individual experiences that led them to behave so differently. The obvious changes within the participants of the program fascinated me. I sought ways to learn from what they experienced, and continued to listen carefully to the youths in the months that passed so that they could teach me about what sport participation and physical activity involvement meant in the greater context of their overall lives.

Constructivist Paradigm, Hermeneutics and Interpretive Inquiry

This research project has been undertaken through the lenses of Constructivism, the principles of Hermeneutics, and the method of interpretive inquiry. As a basic belief system, Constructivism posits that

> …realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experimentally based, local and specific in nature (although elements are often shared among many individuals and even across cultures), and dependent for their form or content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110).

Findings and meaning are understood to be *created* or *constructed* through the interaction of the inquirer and the phenomenon which the inquirer studies. This belief is in opposition to what researchers working from a more traditional, Positivist paradigm for example, would conceptualize in that an objective "truth" is not sought or even believed to exist. Instead, researchers practicing Constructivism believe that what can be known is intertwined with the interaction between an investigator and a particular object or group – the process of understanding is a collective construction, if you will. From this view, there is no one truth, only interpretations of reality which aim to represent a more or less informed or sophisticated constructed understanding of what is real (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Moreover, the methodologies of Constructivist research follow the principles of hermeneutics and lend themselves well to interpretive inquiry in that any constructions of meaning, thought, understanding, etc., are interpreted using conventional hermeneutical techniques. With interpretive inquiry, "the interpreter works holistically, rather than (for

example) using classification systems, in an effort to discern the intent or meaning behind another's expression" (Ellis, 1998a, p. 15). Within the present research project, I sought to work holistically with my participants in the activity group by learning as much as possible about the many facets and intricacies of their lives. I understood that it would be important for me to have an appreciation for what made up their life experiences as a whole in order to be able to frame the information they would possibly offer concerning their specific experiences in sport and physical activity settings. The details of the process I used to form holistic understandings of my participants are outlined in the sections that follow.

Interpretive inquiry as a thought process and method of collecting information affords distinctive value in pursuing deeper understanding through the acknowledgment of the interconnectedness between both the parts and the whole inherent in all human understanding. "To understand a part, one must understand the whole, and to understand the whole, one must understand the individual parts" (Ellis, 1998a, p. 16). The back and forth movement between the parts and the whole can be illustratively understood in terms of the forward and backward arcs of the "hermeneutic circle" (see Appendix A, Ellis, 1998a, p. 27; Packer & Addison, 1989). The forward arc

> ...entails making sense of a research participant, situation, or set of data by drawing on one's forestructure, which is the current product of one's autobiography (beliefs, values, interests, interpretive frameworks) and one's relationship to the question or problem (pre-understandings and concerned engagements) (Ellis, 1998a, p. 27).

The backward arc "entails endeavoring to see what went unseen in the initial interpretation resulting from projection. The data are re-examined for contradictions, gaps, omissions, or for confirmations of the initial interpretation. Alternative interpretive frameworks are purposely searched for and 'tried on'" (Ellis, 1998a, p. 27).

The forward arc within the research here involved the self-awareness to note my past experiences not as a means of identifying my personal biases per se, but to embrace what experiences I have had in order to understand the participants in this study and interpret the data they provided. While working with my participants and their data, I used everything I knew to inform my interpretation and understanding. Prior to beginning this research, I felt that my experience and genuine interest in the youths and their stories would predispose me to being empathetic and attentive to the significance of the variety of data I would encounter. This deliberate reflection is a responsibility I undertook in preparation for "entering the circle" in an appropriate and conscious manner (Packer & Addison, 1989). In retrospect, I believe that the personal connection I had to my project enabled me to recognize and value my participants' life stories and experiences as I sought to find language that was appropriate for expressing what I have learned from them, as well as my understandings of their experiences.

Conceptual Framework

In addition to identifying the personal experiences that led me to be interested in researching this area, my personal background in sport sciences afforded me the opportunity to continuously read sport-related literature, which enabled me to form numerous preliminary interpretations of the participants' stories and experiences. In effect, I originally hypothesized that one possible interpretation of the change in

behaviors and attitudes of the youth in the disability sport and activity program was that their involvement may have provided the opportunity for them to become more self-determined.

Self-determination is a combination of knowledge, beliefs, and skills that enable an individual to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated behavior and is based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself (Field & Hoffman, 1994; Field, Hoffman, & Spezia, 1998). In light of the aforementioned research, one domain in which youths with disabilities may be able to learn skills for self-determination is sport and physical activity settings. Several studies have outlined possibilities of fulfilling various *components* of self-determination as they relate to participation in sport and physical activity (Markland, 1999; Ntoumanis, 2001; Pensgaard & Sorensen, 2002; Ryan, Frederick, Lepes, Rubio, & Sheldon, 1997), but the research has not examined youths with disabilities in sport settings as of yet. It may be possible that self-determination as defined by Field and Hoffman (1994) for example, can be fostered for youths with disabilities in sport and physical activity as the children learn their strengths and weaknesses, set goals, take risks, and self-regulate their own behavior within an active setting.

However, while I had noted *one* possibility within the proposed 'forward arc' of the research process that may have been a clue to understanding the youths' behaviors and perceptions, my familiarity with the available research regarding self-determination only formed the preliminary basis for my inquiry. Consistent with hermeneutic practices, I continuously reflected upon the shape that my data picture created as I consciously progressed through the processes of the 'backward arc'. Specifically, as I aimed to learn from the overall experiences of children with disabilities, as well as their experiences in

sport and physical activity settings, my research intentions were open to contemplate the complexity of possibilities that the data may have presented. Consequently, I persistently monitored my personal processes while working with the data I collected.

Further reading and questioning both myself and the data I collected led me to believe that the youths' experiences could more fittingly be discussed and interpreted in relation to *Place research*. Place research seemed to suit the data more than a self-determination framework – it encompassed more of what the youth's experiences described. For example, instead of the youth describing instances of being involved in activities that had led them to feel empowered and self-actualized, I more often heard instances of how significant *places* had contributed to their experience with certain sports and activities. Of particular importance is the recognition that I have followed but one possible interpretation of the data which spoke well to me given the forestructure I brought to my project, and considering the ways in which I view the world. However, I am optimistic that in the chapters that follow, the reasons for this interpretation on my behalf will become clear as the depth and breadth of the data and the information used to assess the plausibility of my interpretation are revealed.

In brief, the placeness of a place is understood to be a subjective or intersubjective creation, and is therefore only apparent to those who create it (Smith, Light, & Roberts, 1998). The study and meaning of space and place have their roots in cultural geography, phenomenological philosophy, post-colonial studies and architecture for example (Ellis, 2002; Eyles, 1989). Encouragingly, a number of researchers have recently expanded the foundation of place literature by investigating the experience of place in the everyday lives of children and youths. Findings of this recent work have included discussions of

how youths may fulfill developmental needs for social interaction, retreat, feelings of safety, positive identity, and integration within a cohesive community culture with the experience of different *places* in their everyday lives (Clark & Uzzell, 2002; de Connick-Smith & Gutman, 2004; Ellis, 2002, Ellis, 2004; Karsten, 2003; Kytta, 2002; Rasmussen, 2004).

Identification of the research problem. To date, the above researchers have focused their efforts on learning the perceptions of place for able-bodied youths while the place experiences for youths with disabilities have remained uninvestigated. As children and youths with disabilities tend to have unique experiences regarding integration and participation within schools settings (Blinde & McCallister, 1998; Goodwin, 2001a; Kozub & Porretta, 1996), accessibility to public places (Skar, 2003), and social marginalization (Blomqvist, Brown, Peersen, & Presler, 1998; Skar, 2003), the meanings associated with places in the lives of youths with disabilities warrant special consideration.

Generally, the trend in adapted physical activity has been for researchers to study the *parts of places* (i.e., the psychological climate afforded by participation in certain places, social interactions of youths with disabilities within places, barriers and facilitators to achieve inclusive participation in activities, etc.) rather than seeking a complimenting holistic appreciation for the experiences of youths with disabilities within places overall. Methodologically, researchers in the field have typically used surveys, questionnaires and assessment instruments with pre-defined categorical schemes to learn the intricacies of behaviors with participants (e.g. Pensgaard, Roberts, & Ursin, 1999; Rintala, Lyytinen, & Dunn, 1990; Sherrill & Rainbolt, 1988; White & Duda, 1993).

Notably however, the use of semi-structured interviews, focus groups and alternative data collection such as participant drawings and photographs have also recently proved valuable in learning from participants as well (Blinde & McClung, 1997; Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Hodge, Ammah, Casebolt, Lamaster, & O'Sullivan, 2004).

Purpose statement and brief methodological overview. The purpose of this study was two-fold. First, given that the literature in adapted physical activity is limited in terms of knowledge of the holistic experiences of youths with disabilities in active settings, one purpose of this study was to learn about and describe the active experiences of five youths with physical disabilities. I aimed to learn what the experience of participating in physical activity, sport, recreation, leisure and/or exercise settings was like for the youths, and using an interpretive approach I collected narratives of the youths' experiences by engaging in a series of in-depth interviews with them. As well, I also involved the use of participant drawings to help guide our interactive discussions.

Secondly, the design of this study was created to also learn the meaning(s) and significance of physical activity, sport, recreation, leisure and/or exercise to each of the five youths with physical disabilities in this study. Realizing that active environments comprise but one place in the lives of the youths, I first gained an understanding for the youths' lives as a whole in order to be able to interpretively contextualize narratives about their activity experiences. I listened carefully to the youths' experiences within the places of their everyday lives and learned the ways that each child made sense of his or her lifeworlds. I then guided the youths to share their experiences of active places in order to further my understandings of how places affording physical activity were involved in the youths' overall life blueprints.

Delimitations

This research project included five youths with disabilities residing in Alberta. Only youths with disabilities aged 13-18 years who had mobility impairments and no reported cognitive limitations were asked to volunteer. In addition, the children were sampled based on their present membership in a specialized disability sport and activity program.

Limitations

The proposed research included in-depth interviewing; therefore, the quality and depth of the data collected in interviews depended largely on perceived rapport between the participants and I. However, to increase the likelihood of genuine rapport, I attended and participated in, all activity sessions for the specialized program both before and after data collection was completed. In total, I participated with the youth twice a week for the sport and activity sessions, for two eight-month program terms. Data collection began shortly after twelve months of participation with the youth had elapsed. Furthermore, I recognized that the quality of the participant responses might also be affected by my interviewing skills. To promote the report of in-depth, meaningful responses by the participants, I involved myself in formal interview training before meeting with any potential participants.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

Over the years, a large portion of research pertaining to people with disabilities and their participation in physical activity and sports has been directed toward populations of adults and athletes with disabilities. Research interests have been widely varied. Important topics have included, for example, discussions of the basic physiological benefits of athletic participation by individuals with disabilities such as: reduced heart rate and blood pressure; maintenance and enhancement of healthy bone density, muscles and joints; improved muscular strength and endurance, and increased flexibility (Durstine, Painter, Franklin, Morgan, & Pitetti, 2000). Health professionals have also promoted activity participation for individuals in order to reduce secondary conditions often experienced by individuals with disabilities including obesity, hypertension, and pressure sores (Rimmer, 1999).

Complementary work has investigated social and psychological dimensions of sport for athletes and adult non-athletes with disabilities (Hutzler, 1997; Sherrill & Rainbolt, 1988; Valliant, Bezzubyk, Daley, & Asu, 1985; Williams, 1994). For example, individuals with disabilities have reported enjoyment for sports and activities because sports can be a means to experience their bodies in new ways, gain valuable social experiences, increase perceived confidence to pursue new physical activities, and challenge negative stereotypes pertaining to their disabilities (Blinde & McClung, 1997; Sherrill, 1984). According to Weiss, Diamond, Demark, and Lovald (2003), specialized sport programs such as Special Olympics can be used to affect psychological change in

athletes including improvements in global self-worth, and increased perceptions of physical competence.

Further delving into the issues of personal psychology for athletes and individuals with disabilities, researchers in adapted physical activity and related fields have also studied the role of motivation in physical activity and sport settings. Investigators have proposed the use of theoretical frameworks specifically relating to motivation within special populations (e.g., Vallerand & Reid, 1990). Population-specific theoretical work then paved the way for others to focus their efforts on possible motives for participation amongst athletes with disabilities (Brasile, Kleiber, & Harnisch, 1991; Duda & White, 1992; Pensgaard et al., 1999), and to also provide strategies on how to use empirical knowledge of motivation in order to increase physical activity participation in individuals with disabilities (Kosma, Cardinal, & Rintala, 2002).

Considering the prominent focus on athletes with disabilities, it is unsurprising that several researchers in the area of adapted physical activity have also fittingly advocated for the use of techniques and principles of sport psychology for athletes with disabilities (Ogilvie, 1990; Page & Wayda, 2001). Although sport psychology had typically been associated with able-bodied athletes, sport psychology professionals have argued that athletes with disabilities can also benefit from training in: arousal control; attention and concentration; imagery; and overall pre-competition preparation, and should therefore be provided with the same professional consultation opportunities as able-bodied athletes (Asken, 1991; Crocker, 1993; Hanrahan, 1998).

Understanding the experiences and benefits of physical activity and sport settings for adults and athletes with disabilities is undoubtedly a warranted endeavor, however, in

recent years, researchers have also begun to take particular interest in the physical activity experiences of children and youths with disabilities (e.g., Adamson, 2004; Goodwin, 2001b, Mrug & Wallander, 2002; Taub & Greer, 2000). Increased interest in youth populations is wise for several reasons. First, youths are the very seeds of future athletes from which previous research efforts have already been directed. As well, research concerning the many experiences of youths with disabilities in physical activity settings has not yet been exhausted in terms of: research to support positions in the debate of segregation, integration, or inclusion within schools and specialized settings; socialization opportunities; disability identity construction; health and fitness measures; explored possibilities to foster empowerment; and, experiences of active places. Thus, these topical areas are worthy of further research.

Youths with disabilities in physical activity and sport settings

In response to a large number of relatively untapped research avenues, academics, practitioners, and professionals in the collective fields of adapted physical activity, recreation therapy, physiotherapy and rehabilitative medicine have been making concerted efforts in recent years to learn about youths with disabilities within the realm of physical activity and sport. Their works have made great strides in furthering our present understandings of the physiological, psychological, social, and affective experiences potentially fostered for youths with disabilities through their participation in physical activity and sport settings.

Physiologically, participation in sport and physical activity settings benefits children and youths similarly to adults and athletes with (and without) disabilities. In specific, researchers have posited that activity participation by youths with disabilities

can improve muscular strength and endurance, increase cardiopulmonary fitness, (Darrah, Wessel, Nearingburg, & O'Connor, 1999; Wind, Schwend, & Larson, 2004) and improve body coordination for sport specific skills such as throwing or catching a ball (Okely, Booth, & Patterson, 2001; Rintala et al., 1990).

Although physical heath benefits of physical activity are certainly important, the social and psychological affordances of physical activities may be argued to be of equal importance for youths with disabilities. Several researchers have suggested that youths with physical disabilities seem to have fewer opportunities than their able-bodied peers to participate in physical and social activities (Blomqvist et al., 1998; Skar, 2003; Skar & Tamm, 2002; van der Dussen, Nieuwstraten, & Stam, 2001). As children and youths spend the majority of their time throughout childhood and early adulthood in schools where many physical and social opportunities are had, one avenue that researchers have investigated has been the experiences of youths with disabilities within school environments. School activity experiences have a significant impact on many areas of the lives of children with and without disabilities including future sport participation and adopting an active lifestyle (Brittain, 2004).

School Physical Education Experiences of Youths with Disabilities

Kozub and Porretta (1996) have advocated for youths with disabilities to participate in the most inclusive school settings possible, and suggest that all participants in physical activity benefit from inclusive practices by building team dynamics, fostering a competitive spirit, and promoting societal acceptance. In agreement with the aforementioned research, Mrug and Wallander (2002) have also plainly suggested that integration is favored by youths with physical disabilities in classroom settings. Their

work revealed that integrated students with disabilities reported lower levels of aggression, more positive views of themselves, and more positive views of the world in comparison to students with disabilities who were educated in segregated, specialized schools. Although the integrated youths reportedly favored integrated settings, it was not clear whether the youths in this study ever experienced segregated education environments in order to make an informed preferred choice.

Also in the school environment, the opinions and perceptions of youths with physical disabilities who participated in school physical education have been captured in several qualitative studies (Blinde & McCallister, 1998; Goodwin, 2001b; Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Hutzler, Fliess, Chacham, & Van den Auweele, 2002). However, the youths' feedback regarding their integrated participation tended to be situation, or activity-specific, and appeared slightly more complex than the previously mentioned studies. For example, Goodwin and Watkinson (2000) learned that elementary students with physical disabilities experienced both good and bad days in physical education. In detail, participants generally experienced good days when they felt they could skillfully participate in games and drills, when they could share in the fun and benefits, and when they experienced a sense of belonging. On the contrary, bad days for the students were experienced when they felt socially isolated, experienced restricted participation and when the students perceived their competence in class had been questioned by either their classmates or the teacher.

Similarly, the youths with physical disabilities in a study by Hutzler et al. (2002) did not suggest a global like or dislike of physical education when the youths described experiences where they felt included and experienced elements of empowerment. Instead,

the youths with disabilities experienced physical education differentially depending on: the perceptions they felt their classmates had of their assistive device during gym activities (wheelchair, brace, etc.); the inclusive (or non-inclusive) actions of the physical education teacher; and interactions with peers in their class. Like the youths in Goodwin and Watkinson's study (2000), the youths in Hutzler et al.'s (2002) project also enjoyed physical education class when they felt like they belonged – particularly when classmates cheered them on and encouraged them to participate in the games. Naturally, the youths conversely disliked physical education class when they were teased or ridiculed by other children (Hutzler et al., 2002).

Youths with disabilities see their teachers as important people in the management of attitudes of other students toward their disabilities (e.g. Skar, 2003). Thus, researchers investigating the participation of youths with disabilities in school physical education have also been interested the perspectives of physical education teachers relating to their inclusive physical education efforts (Block & Rizzo, 1995; Hodge et al., 2004). The teachers of these studies expressed favorable beliefs about the philosophy of inclusion, but they encountered challenges in establishing inclusive practice which the teachers suggested might be due in part to inadequate professional educational preparation, and lack of support and resources to effectively teach students with more involved disabilities. In recent years, a number of different tools have become increasingly more available to assist general physical education teachers with their inclusion planning including: contracted adapted physical educators, online resources, and textual materials (e.g., Block, 2000).

Specialized Activity Program Participation by Youths with Disabilities

Outside of the school environment, valuable physical and social experiences are also fostered for youths with disabilities through their participation in specialized activity programs. The settings of specialized sport and activity programs are often community facilities, which naturally encourage participants to view exercise as a social activity, rather than a medical or required activity (Darrah et al., 1999). As noted previously, opportunities to be part of social experiences are of particular importance to youths with disabilities.

Specialized sport participation (i.e., disability or adapted sport) offers youths with disabilities the unique opportunity to meet with others, make friends, and develop a sense of ownership in group identities (Haraguchi, 1981; Pensgaard & Sorensen, 2002). As well, participating in specialized activities can also be a normalizing experience for youths with disabilities (Taub & Greer, 2000). According to Taub and Greer (2000), by engaging in common childhood activities such as sports participation, youths are provided an opportunity to feel like "normal" or typical youths rather than simply youths with disabilities. Several researchers have noted that specialized activities also often provide settings in which social networks with peers are enhanced (Kristen, Patriksson, & Fridlund, 2002; Taub & Greer, 2000).

Kristen et al. (2002) interviewed 20 adolescents with physical disabilities in order to learn how the youths perceived their participation in a specialized physical activity program. The youths indicated numerous advantages to sports participation, namely, getting new friends, learning, strengthening one's physique, becoming someone, experiencing nature, and having a good time. "Getting new friends" represented getting to know new friends from an emotional and social aspect, and being able to pursue sport

together from a physical aspect. "Learning" described the youths' achievement of both concrete and experience-based knowledge about sport specific skills that transfer to life, like knowing that some days will be better than others. "Strengthening one's physique" described the youths' conceptions about their physical improvements in functional abilities and health. "Becoming someone" was a theme described by the youths when they described instances of the specialized physical activity program when they felt they had been accepted by the group and when they felt they had gained self-confidence. "Experiencing nature" represented the youths' inner satisfactions with experiencing nature and the openness to move freely in the woods and fields. Finally, "having a good time" illustrated the youths' joy in understanding rules, playing both formally and casually, and experiencing success.

The perceived benefits of participating in specialized activity programs have also been investigated from the perspectives of parents of youths with physical disabilities (Kristen, Patriksson, & Fridlund, 2003). The perspectives of parents vary slightly when compared to the youths' perceptions in that specialized settings are valued by parents for their abilities to: promote good health, teach sporting activities to their children such that they are able to experience success, and provide opportunities for social interaction.

A Holistic View of Physical Activity Participation by Youths with Disabilities

Physical activity literature pertaining to youths with disabilities has included modes of viewing youths with disabilities as *whole* beings and not merely from the perspective of disease, injury or limitations (see Kristen et al., 2002). However, when referring to the settings in which youths with disabilities participate in physical activities, the dominant trend in adapted physical activity has generally been for researchers to

study the *parts of places* rather than taking a complementary holistic view of the youths' experiences in those places. To illustrate, the aim of many studies has been to break overall places of physical activity for youths down into their parts, such as: the barriers and facilitators associated with the successful athletic participation a place (Meyers, Anderson, Miller, Shipp, & Hoenig, 2002; Rimmer, Riley, Wang, Rauworth, & Jurkowski, 2004); the social or psychological climates of the place; or the interactive design of places in terms of inclusive, integrated, or segregated designations.

This method of reducing the place to its parts may seem more manageable and is indeed helpful in knowing *about* a place. However, in order to understand the significance of places and learn about the kinds of experiences afforded by places, we must acquire an appreciation for the interconnectedness of the parts of a place – the back and forth flow between the parts and the experience of the *whole* place. Sherrill's (1998) notion of an "ecosystem" as an individual in continuous interaction with his or her environment compliments the idea of the interconnectedness of experiences in place.

One framework that might potentially help address suggestions for physical activity and sport environments to be wholly considered in relation to the experiences of youths with disabilities is that of *Place*. Recent discussions on the experience of place for people with disabilities (Gleeson, 1998; Imrie, 2001; Kitchin, 1998) are welcome and refreshing given that their implications will undoubtedly tempt the future directions of research involving people of all ages with disabilities. To date, however, works on disability and place have been primarily historically, theoretically and philosophically driven, with few examples of direct application to the present-day lives of youths and adults with disabilities. Furthermore, the current literature has not yet related to

experiences of physical activities by people with disabilities in place. Despite a general lack of applied work specifically relating to the place experiences of people with disabilities, research on the everyday experiences of place for able-bodied children and youths (review to follow) provides an intriguing window in which we might expect future research in adapted physical activity to parallel.

Contextualizing Space and Place

Space and *Place* as a pair of concepts have roots in a wide variety of research fields and philosophical traditions, some of which include: cultural geography, sociology, feminist theory, post-colonial studies, phenomenological philosophy, religion and architecture (Ellis, 2002; Eyles, 1989). The versatility of both space and place within many different disciplines has relied upon a tweaking in process of how one comes to conceptualize place within a given work.

Space can be understood to be a concept that denotes opportunity for creative development and growth (Ellis, 2003; Hay, 1992). Space should not be considered nothingness but instead, can be more constructively be understood as "freedom" and as the *potential* to be identified as place (Tuan, 1977). As Tuan (1977) notes, "what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (p. 6).

Creating place then, involves the human agency of assigning value and meaning to the spaces in our lives (Ellis, 2002). Researchers in the field have referred to place as the centre of felt value and of a profound centre of human existence (Eyles, 1989; Tuan, 1977), and the anchor for physical and psychological community (Ellis, 2004). Moreover, space is "not only an arena for everyday life – its geographical or spatial co-ordinates –

(but) it, in itself, provides *meaning* to that life" (Eyles, 1989, p. 109). Natural and perhaps more familiar recognitions of place and personalized sense of place may include locales (Hummon, 1992; Wasserman, Womersley, & Gottlieb, 1998), examples of which might be Halifax, Austin or Victoria. However, place can also refer to the meaning ascribed to time spent with a *thing*. A car, a swimming pool, and a rocking chair could be separate examples of places, according to the individual who attaches meaning to them. It is important to remember that "the placeness of a place is a subjective or intersubjective creation, and therefore apparent only to the individual or group members who create it" (Smith et al., 1998, p.6).

An example of this point is the creation of place by a child within the space of a school playground. The child may not consider the playground as a whole, but *one tunnel* on the playground, a place. The tunnel might be a place for positive or negative reasons, but regardless of the reason, the child has ascribed meaning to it. For example, the tunnel may be a place the child can go that is quiet and away from other children. On the other hand, perhaps the tunnel has been a site of imaginative social play for the child with his or her friends – together they used to pretend it was a submarine and go on creative adventures. Or, perhaps the tunnel is a place of great fear, whereby the child is worried the walls may collapse before he or she can get to the other side. To any other child or adult, the tunnel may seemingly be a simple yellow, plastic tube, completely void of animism or significant meaning.

Thus, as the meanings of places are only fully understood by those who create them, it becomes of paramount importance for researchers to take an interest in learning about the many places that comprise the everyday lives of the people they study.

Particular interest should be paid to the words, feelings, meanings and language that people use to describe these places. An appreciation for these places will help us to contextualize the experiences of individuals' everyday lives and help us to better understand and interpret each person holistically.

Introduction to place in the lives of children and youths (of all abilities). Recent research has identified that youths may fulfill developmental needs for social interaction, retreat, feelings of safety, a positive identity, and integration within a cohesive community culture with the experience of different *places* in their everyday lives (Clark & Uzzell, 2002; de Connick-Smith & Gutman, 2004; Ellis, 2002, Ellis, 2004; Karsten, 2003; Kytta, 2002; Rasmussen, 2004). While much of the specific research discussing places in the lives of youths has focused on able-bodied youths, it is likely that many of the benefits of nurturing places are also applicable to youths with disabilities.

A growing body of research in a variety of disciplines has recognized the importance of attending to the meanings and use of place in the lives of able-bodied children (Chawla, 1992; 2002; Derr, 2002; Ellis, 2002; Matthews & Limb, 1999; Rasmussen, 2004). Research concerning places in the lives of children have included the places of parks, buildings, spaces used for young children's care, education and play, and the virtual space of the World Wide Web (Bingham, Vallentine, & Holloway, 1999; Valentine, 2000). Considering these places, Rasmussen (2004) has suggested an interesting dynamic relating to children's experiences of place. Building on her work with two foundation projects: "Children's Institutionalized and Everyday Life" and "Neighborhood Structure, Urban Quality and Children's Everyday Life", Rasmussen

(2004) gestured that "places for children" and "children's places" are two altogether different concepts that are both are deserving of attention.

First, Rasmussen (2004) suggests that 'places for children' bring children to large institutionalized locations like private homes, schools, and recreational facilities. She coined the term "institutionalized triangle" to describe the triad of home, school and recreational institution where many children spend the majority of their time. These are places made by adults for children and often "put children in contact with 'professional' adults – the pedagogues, social workers, teachers and psychologists who staff these institutions" (p. 157).

In contrast, Rasmussen (2004) used the term "children's places" to refer to places created by children for their own play and use. Children's places may exist outdoors, indoors and on the routes between the arenas of the institutionalized triangle. For example, she notes that if a child climbs a tree and enjoys imaginative play with that tree, the tree would be considered a children's place; the same way goal posts between two bushes may also transform into a children's place. "This shows that children and their bodies tacitly point out that they need different places than those adults create for them" (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 161).

Rasmussen's (2004) proposition that "children's places are often less conspicuous than places for children, and adults perceive them from a different perspective than children…" (p. 162) meshes nicely with Smith et al.'s (1998) notion that places are apparent only to those who create them. Children's places also seem consistent with Relph's (1976) conceptualization of a place as that which human consciousness

experiences as having meaning and that which causes a given physical location to take on character and existence.

Speaking in regard to children with mobility impairments, what do "children's places" look like for children with disabilities, within the bounds of Rasmussen's (2004) "institutional triangle"? Are the imaginative play spaces they create comparable to able-bodied children? These are questions that currently remain unanswered, but perhaps one caveat to consider is whether home, school and recreational institutions are the only three "institutions" that collect the majority of time for children with disabilities. For many children with disabilities, a significant portion of their time is allotted to 'medicinal institutions'. These include regular hours spent with physiotherapists, recreation therapists, specialty physicians and surgeons – including formal recovery time and at-home maintenance of health programs prescribed by the practitioners of these places. How do children with disabilities experience *these* places and how might these places interact with the places of 'the institutional triangle'? Does the added dynamic to the typical institutional grouping of able-bodied children influence the creation of children's places by children with disabilities? Again, these questions are currently unanswered, but further research is warranted indeed.

Places and Developmental Needs

According to recent literature, places provide fulfillment of a number of types of needs for children and adolescents. Researchers have suggested that it is important to understand the needs of children and adolescents, and how places may accommodate those needs so that we might in turn encourage place attachment. Place attachment is a valued outcome resulting from the attribution of meaning to a place. Those involved in

creating 'places for children' can use this information in the physical, social, and psychological construction of places, and when interacting with youths about places of importance to them (e.g. de Connick-Smith, 2004; Kytta, 2002). Importantly, it has not been suggested however, that specific 'need fulfillment' (or its lack) as a result of place experience necessarily renders a place to be favorable or unfavorable.

Place attachment via security. Chawla (1992) notes that places provide the potential for three types of need satisfaction in order to develop place attachments, including: security, social affiliation, and creative expression and exploration. She describes security as a primary need for preschool aged children. It may be argued however that places providing physical and emotional security are important at all stages of development. For instance, a sense of emotional security (in addition to physical security) during adolescence is of particular importance to youths with disabilities (Whitney-Thomas & Moloney, 2001). According to Skar (2003) "the self-image of adolescents with a disability is profoundly influenced by how others perceive them, i.e. by the attitudes toward disability that prevail in society…many of which are felt by adolescents with disabilities as negative" (p. 636). Here, the concern for emotional security lies in the interaction between the peoples of the place. While the age of adolescence represents an early adulthood stage of development (Chawla, 1992), we must not underestimate the realities of social "bullying" by peers and of adolescents with disabilities being made to feel "different" in an undesirable way. Places for children and youths with disabilities must be increasingly attentive of the emotional security of places in order to help foster place attachment, as noted by Chawla (1992).

Place attachment via social affiliation. Social affiliation is the second need to be fulfilled in order for place attachments to be formed (Chawla, 1992; 2002). Similar to Chawla's belief, Karsten (2003) suggests that "children need places to meet, play and to communicate with other children" (p. 459), and that these interactions are an essential part to the process of growing up. The ability for places to provide social experiences is argued to be of heightened importance to youths and adolescents with disabilities. Skar (2003) and others (Barron, 2001; Blomqvist et al., 1998; Skar & Tamm, 2002) note that adolescents with disabilities seem to have significantly fewer opportunities for social integration and participation in physical and social environments than their able-bodied peers. The same researchers have also suggested that making relationships with peers is considerably more complex for adolescents with disabilities in comparison to their able-bodied counterparts. Considering this, Skar's (2003) research concerning the peer and adult relationships of adolescents with physical disabilities unsurprisingly found that adolescents with disabilities had fewer friends. However, she also found that adults quite often fill the role of confidante for adolescents with disabilities in lieu of age-appropriate friends.

If places can afford social affiliation (Chawla, 2002) for able-bodied children and adolescents, why do adolescents with disabilities have difficulty achieving this? There are numerous possibilities for this, three of which I will expand further on here. First, very little is known about the preferred places of adolescents and youths with disabilities which thus makes it difficult to infer why the potential social experiences of a place are lacking compared to research on able-bodied youths. Tallies of behavior mapping for most frequently used, and preferred places have not been systematically conducted for

youths with disabilities in the way they have been detailed for able-bodied youths (Chawla, 1992; Clark & Uzzel, 2002; Derr, 2002, Korpela, 1992; Kytta, 2002).

Secondly, lack of social affiliation experiences for adolescents with disabilities in typical adolescent places may also be related to accessibility and teen culture. "During the adolescent years, young people tend to congregate in many different environments (e.g. sport arenas, cinemas, discos, and related places).... The accessibility of these environments is often severely restricted for persons with physical disabilities" (Skar, 2003, p. 644-645). However, in reprieve of inaccessible teen hangouts and waning personal friendship, today's technology has made it possible for adolescents with and without disabilities to create many different friendships though online discussion groups (Bingham et al., 1999; Skar, 2003; Valentine, 2000).

> The adolescents with restricted mobility reported that they could remain anonymous in these relationships via the internet, which commonly occurred at home, and that they did not have to reveal their disability to their Internet 'friends'. Thus a strategy of anonymity about their disability helped them to feel like any other adolescent. (Skar, 2003, p. 641)

What is not yet known, is whether this new mode of 'friend-making' for youths with disabilities is adaptive or whether building online friends potentially masks underlying issues related to achieving quality social relationships. Further research investigating the use of technology by adolescents with disabilities for the purpose of friend-making and to achieve feelings of inclusion and belonging in virtual places is needed.

Thirdly, parents, personal aides and caregivers have reportedly restricted the development of self-reliance in some youths with disabilities, as well as the youths'

social involvement (Skar, 2003). The overprotective tendencies of some parents and caregivers has negative effects on youths with disabilities by limiting their experiences of new places as well as the opportunities for social affiliation these places provide. Overprotection also serves as an obstacle to the youths' efforts to achieve independence or interdependence (Adams, 2000). Feeling within the grasp of another's control and having little or no involvement in decisions involving their own lives have commonly been personal complaints reported by people with disabilities. Moreover, people with disabilities may feel trapped because their freedom to develop personally is constrained to take place within the places they are *allowed* to be attached by caregivers. As Eyles (1989) puts it: "To be tied to one place may well enmesh a person in the familiar and the routine from which no escape seems possible. This may affect the relatively immobile most of all" (p. 10).

Lieberg's (1997) work with Swedish adolescents further echoes Chawla's (1992) argument for the importance of places that provide social opportunities in the lives of youths. However, based on an investigation of how adolescents appropriate their local environment, Lieberg (1997) suggested that adolescents also need places of *retreat*. These are places where adolescents can withdraw from their everyday roles… places used to avoid other adolescents and peers.

From Lieberg's (1997) perspective then, the literature discussing the socialization patterns of adolescents and youths with disabilities tells only part of the story. A more representative way of seeing the interaction of youths with disabilities would be in terms of their opportunities for socialization *and* for retreat. In other words, while the research on adolescents with disabilities reads that they spend more time alone (retreat?) and with

adults instead of with age-appropriate friends, the *retreat* may in fact be an underlying need.

Place attachment via creative expression and exploration. In relation to the last need highlighted by Chawla (1992) for fostering place attachment, the need for experiences of creative expression and exploration are paramount:

> At every age, there is also a need for undefined space where young people can formulate their own worlds: for free space where preschoolers can manipulate the environment and play "let's pretend" in preparation for middle childhood demands; for hideouts and play houses indoors and out where school-age children can practice independence; and for public hangouts and private refuges where adolescents can test new social relationships and ideas. (p. 69)

In keeping with the need for places of creative expression and exploration, current research stresses the importance for children to have access to natural environments, to green areas – places where adult rules need not apply and children's imaginations roam freely. "Children with access to a natural environment respond to its qualities --- the appeal of its sensorial characteristics; its malleability; and its capacity for soothing" (Ellis, 2004).

Cross-culturally, children consistently report their preferences for outdoor places and the kinds of activities afforded by those places. For example, Kytta (2002) studied the affordances of children's environments through a number of interviews with 8-9 year old children from Finland and Belarus. Repeatedly, the children shared that the most prominent positive features of the environment were those that afforded creative play, active play making, and "mouldable materials" such as dirt, sand and snow where the

children could mould or build the environment into something new. Similarly, Derr (2002) reported that Mexican children also preferred places that afforded outdoor exploration, with natural places such as mountains, rivers, and ditches. Places with plants or animals were selected by the children as "favorite places" and "exploring places".

Behavior mapping related to able-bodied adolescents' favorite places again reveals a similar pattern of preference for creative and malleable environments (see Clark & Uzzel, 2002; Korpela, 1992). While accessibility would seem to pose a potential concern for adolescents with disabilities in *their* preferences for experiencing natural environments, Kristen et al. (2002) learned that the youths with disabilities reported enjoyment in spending time in the countryside. The researchers relayed that conception of the experience oscillated between gaining an inner appreciation for the earth and environment, and appreciating an external satisfaction through being able to move freely in the woods and fields. Even though details of individual abilities of the youths in the study were not provided, the finding certainly suggests that some adolescents with disabilities are experiencing outdoor environments positively and without reported concerns of accessibility. Indeed, natural environments for all people with limited mobility are becoming ever more negotiable with the onset of improved technology for all-terrain wheelchairs, specially trained companion dogs, durable outdoor canes and all-season hiking walkers, as well as a multitude of alternate forms of assisted transportation and exploration from electric three wheeled mountain bikes to wilderness access devices like the TrailRider. However, future research investigating the experience of place for adolescents with disabilities in outdoor and natural environments is welcomed and would provide a significant contribution to the foundation of adapted physical activity literature.

Place Attachment and Youths with Disabilities via Sport and Activity Settings

Currently, research on the experience of, and need for, places of physical activity, creative movement, recreation, sport, and leisure for adolescents with disabilities is scant. We know little about the kinds of active play places for, and created by, youths with disabilities. However, what is known about the experiences of able-bodied children and youths, is that helping youths to build a sense of place attachment in their lives promotes healthy development in numerous ways for the youths (e.g. Chawla, 1992; Ellis, 2004). I argue that places for physical activity, recreation and sport can naturally act as places for youths with disabilities to develop place attachments when we consider a multitude of benefits for youths with disabilities relating to their participation in "active" experiences, such as: building social networks, improving health and fitness, experiencing nature, and fostering a sense of belonging both in terms of identity with the sport and potentially to a group as in a team setting (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Hutzler et al., 2002; Kristen et al.,2002).

Chawla (1992) lists a number of sources for developing place attachments for able-bodied children and adolescents such as: "cooperation with others in exploring, games & producing things", "a self-identity in large part determined by physical strength & dexterity" and, "meeting places with friends in commercial and natural environments"(p.67). Considering the recently reviewed literature pertaining to the participation of youths with disabilities within physical activity and sport settings, support for the development of place attachments via "active" settings is optimistic. Basic knowledge of the experiences of "active" places for youths with disabilities will help to shed light on whether in fact, place attachments *can* be fostered through

participation in active places, and what places seem to be of importance to youths with disabilities.

In this regard, the present study was designed to learn from the overall life narratives of five youths with physical disabilities while listening carefully to the meanings they ascribed to places affording physical activity, sport, recreation and leisure. Following the advice of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), it was understood that the specific place experiences relating to physical activity and sport settings of the participants in this study would seem evident only after an appreciation was gained for each youth and their life story as a whole. The results of this work highlight the meaning and significance of places affording physical activity for five youths with disabilities. It is hoped that this study will help build credibility for the use of *Place* in interpreting further applied experiences with populations of people with disabilities, and will further expand the foundation of literature currently available in adapted physical activity.

CHAPTER 3

Method

Participants

Participants in the present study were 5 youths with physical disabilities who use assistive devices (i.e., wheelchairs, crutches, walkers, ankle and foot orthothoses) in physical activity and sport settings, and who were active members of an adapted disability sport and physical activity program which took place in a specialized centre. The youths ranged in age from 15 to 18 years and were sampled purposefully from a convenience sample such that only individuals with physical disabilities who had no additional intellectual disabilities were asked to volunteer in this study. Consistent with requirements of the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta, participant information letters were given to the potential participants and their parents/caregivers, and written consent from both parties were obtained before proceeding further with the study (see Appendices B-G).

Researcher as primary instrument

The nature of interpretive inquiry requires that the researcher act as the primary instrument to collect data. This means that the researcher is responsible for collecting, understanding, and reconstructing participants' stories through the researcher's own use of language. The researcher's choice of language is based upon all sources of information acquired from working with the participants as the researcher attempts to capture the meaning of the participants' anecdotes. According to Merriam (1998), researchers may use six basic strategies to enhance their ability to interpret participants' information as it was intended – in other words, internal validity. They include: triangulation, member

checks, long-term evaluation, peer-examination, participatory or collaborative modes of research, and identifying researcher biases. All of these strategies except utilization of the participatory or collaborative modes of research ("involving participants in all phases of research from conceptualizing the study to writing up the findings" p. 204) have been included in the design of this study. In addition to awareness of the external modes of helping to interpret the data, the researcher's internal processes of change while undertaking the inquiry are key to self-aware data collection. The continuum of change that qualitative researchers may expect to progress through while interacting with their participants has been noted by Boostrom (1994). As a result of his suggestions and personal experiences, a discussion of the change I experienced while undertaking this work follows.

At first when observing the population of youths, I entered a stage that Boostrom refers to as *observer as videocamera*, which is typified by the observer's (or researcher's) ability to only see the surroundings and participants at a very superficial level. While I didn't necessarily enter interaction with my participants on a completely superficial level (because I had already spent an eight-month term volunteering with them), I certainly struggled with the transition from strictly *volunteer* to *volunteer/researcher*. My volunteer lenses allowed me to take in all parts of the interaction with the youth without attempting to filter the information or make connections within information I processed on any given evening. With researcher lenses, I needed to narrow my field of view to primarily include the most relevant pieces of the data puzzle so that I would begin to notice the patterns of interaction among the participants, interactions between my participants and myself, and the intricacies of the unique personal features that

characterized the participants. Once I was knowingly aware of my participants' stories and deeply inquisitive as to their personal plots, I progressed to the next stage of Boostrom's observation guide: *observer as playgoer*.

During the *playgoer* stage, researchers can be thought of members of an audience to the participants, where "they care about what the characters in the drama are going through. They share in the experience" (Boostrom, 1994, p. 54). This stage is where I overcame the vast possibilities of what to observe, and instead became caught up in the stories and lives of the members of the program. Through careful observation and ongoing attentiveness, I started to learn about the players (the participants), and began to form my perceptions and preliminary understandings of the members of the group. I often wrote field notes after the program had ended for the evening to help me recall the settings, feelings, moods and unique situations that I used to aide my analysis process throughout the duration of my project.

Next, Boostrom (1994) notes that the researcher is likely to experience a stage of *observer as evaluator*. It is during this stage that I realized that some preliminary assumptions and opinions I originally made were superficial to understanding the greater picture of the youths' stories as a whole. Although I may have assumed I knew why an individual behaved in a certain way, it was not until I compiled the combined messages of observation, field notes, reflecting on the evening's program, interactions with parents, and numerous interactions with the youths both in group situations and one-on-one situations that I began to truly see the meanings behind certain behaviors. Boostrom notes that it is far more useful to remain open to what the data may offer, than to close ourselves and assume we understand too soon. To this effect, I guarded against premature

conclusions by continuously being self-critical of my research efforts. More specifically, I actively experimented with the backward arc of the hermeneutic circle and looked for contradictions to my original thoughts, as well as omissions and gaps within the data picture.

Fourthly, once I began to act on my role as the primary instrument from which to collect data I arrived at the stage of *observer as subjective inquirer* (Boostrom, 1994), at which point meaning of specific instances became of utmost importance. Throughout this stage I attempted to discover exactly what it was like for each youth to experience sport and physical activity within the context of the rest of their life experiences. For example, I wondered: what does it mean for James to always be the joker of the group? Why is it that Alicia has such little confidence in her abilities at this program? Boostrom suggests that although my interest in the meaning of the members' behaviors may not have appeared until I experienced the previous three stages, my interpretation of the answer to my question began with my very first impressions of them, whether I realized it then or not. "The interpretation does not begin after a bedrock of 'data' has been collected; it begins the moment the observer walks in to the classroom. As the observer changes, so do the data" (Boostrom, 1994, p. 58).

Ideally, once the researcher has had an opportunity to see the participants, be curious about the participants and ask questions about the participants, the researcher will begin to understand the participants from an insider's perspective. This is Boostrom's (1994) fifth stage of observation, called *observer as insider*. It is during this stage that I recognized many more connections between present and past interactions with the youth and what they meant in terms of the greater data picture as a whole for each individual,

and how each story began to contrast with others in the participant group. I began to truly understand and appreciate what the experience of physical activity meant to my participants in different places and how it influenced their behaviors and attitudes. Having a very favorable rapport and a trusting relationship with the participants prior to beginning my research as well as taking great care to treat them as experts in their own lives afforded me an internal perspective where the youths in turn awarded me the status of honorary group member. I was still a volunteer but I was also a friend, and now a voice to interpret their stories. This is the point at which I entered Boostrom's (1994) final stage, *observer as reflective interpreter.*

As a reflective interpreter, I gathered all of the observations, stories, drawings, and other sources of data I collected throughout the duration of my project, and studied them as one to help me see the significance of what the experience of participating in sport and physical activity is like for each of the youths that I worked with in the program. I did not simply aim to relay information coldly and without context, but instead, interpreted the information based on my experiences with the youth, and offer my reflections on how each part of their stories of physical activity and sport seem to fit together to within overall picture that is their lives. Only upon reaching this stage was I able to reflect upon what I had learned, what I have understood, and how I have changed and grown as a person as a result of my inquiry.

Collecting Information

This research utilized a mixed-method qualitative design that was based on a framework of interpretive inquiry to obtain information from the participants. Data was collected from the youths though observation, visual documentation, and several

individual interviews. Although a guide for these procedures was originally created, I realized that the nature of the youths' sport experiences being investigated could hold part of the answer concerning how it should be investigated (Gadamer, 1983). In other words, my methods were somewhat flexible to allow me the greatest opportunity to learn from the youths' perspectives. Importantly, "the mark of good interpretative research is not the degree to which it follows a specified methodological agenda, but in the degree to which it can show understanding of what it is that is being investigated" (Smith, 1991, p. 201). I aimed to achieve an in-depth understanding of the perceptions, personal experiences and motivations of young adolescents with disabilities who participate in sport and physical activity.

To obtain quality, in-depth information from the youths regarding their experiences in physical activity, it was first necessary to establish a degree of rapport between the researcher and the participants (Boggs & Eyberg, 1990). Approximately one year prior to collecting research data with the participants, I volunteered full-time as an activity instructor with the disability sport program that the youths participated in. During the year that I collected data, I continued to volunteer for the fall and winter terms of the program. Collection of data commenced during the third week of January 2004 and ended on the second week of April 2004. This period followed shortly after the disability sport program's Christmas Holiday break, and just before the program's end in mid-April.

Consenting participants were first asked to participate in an informal information session with the other participants in order to introduce the project and explain a pre-interview drawing activity that each would complete. The session was held in the same facility as the program met on a weekly basis, immediately following a program session.

This was a time agreed upon by all of the participating youths and their parents. The length of the session was approximately 15 minutes.

Drawing as expression. Once the drawing activity was explained to the youths, they were each given a folder containing several sheets of blank paper as well as a written copy of the instructions for the drawing activity (see Appendix F). The participants were asked to select a drawing activity from a list of sport and physical activity-based options. Allowing choice promoted control on behalf of the participants, in that they could opt to share only what they wanted to with the researcher. The youths were allowed to complete the activity using any drawing instruments or materials they wished.

Including drawing as a medium for children and youth to communicate allows them the creative opportunity to detail their feelings and other experiences, to explore, invent, and problem solve through self-expression (Malchiodi, 1998). Drawing gives children the chance to convey their ideas non-verbally in age-appropriate ways. They can do this through the creation of metaphors and symbols in their art, and their artwork inadvertently offers the viewer the child's personal perspectives and often an invitation for the viewer to evoke story-telling from the artist (Malchiodi, 1998).

> Art brings the opportunity for truly interpersonal conversation and connection. If we can, in some way, see what the child sees and feel what the child feels and acknowledge their seeing, their feeling and their representation as valid then we will be able to reach out and touch the child in authentic ways. (Brooks, 1995, p. 47)

Having experience with the use of creative activities for youths with disabilities, Anderson (1994) noted that visual communication in the form of drawing, painting, and

creating with three-dimensional materials may have more power to motivate youths than communicating via talking, writing, and reading. As well, Carpenter and Carpenter (1999) have suggested that participating in art activities is a format for children with disabilities to build on their feelings of achievement and self-motivation along with developing a positive self-image. *Self-image* refers to how the individuals perceive themselves, and the authors posit that the development of a positive self-image (such as the opportunity to do so through creative art activities for an accepting audience) would facilitate a student's success in a variety of future endeavors (Carpenter & Carpenter, 1999).

The drawing was not completed at the information session, but rather, the participants were asked to take the take the assignment home with them. After completing it at home, they then returned it the following week when they arrived at the program. The rationale for this was to provide an environment that is inviting and inspiring to draw in. Giving drawing activities in formal settings with "adult furniture" (such as in an office or professional setting) can be a deterrent for art-making with children because it may set up an uncomfortable or difficult situation for them to draw in (Malchiodi, 1998). By permitting children to take the art assignment home, they were able to draw in an environment that was familiar to them. In addition, drawing at home may have afforded the participants a perception of choice. Children can protect their experiences within the safeness of their immediate surroundings and choose which features to include without having a formal evaluator figure occupying the same space (Malchiodi, 1998). Furthermore, since drawing is a process, another important consideration is the time children are allotted to create an art expression (Malchiodi,

1998). With ample time, the youths were more likely to be reflective about the assignment and consider their feelings and thoughts, as well as how they chose to express them on the page, and to what extent they wished to emphasize their feelings.

While many children tend to look excitedly upon the opportunity to draw and create something meaningful with their imaginations, thoughts, and emotions, I recognized that there may have been some children who were resistant to the drawing process. Although reasons for resistance may be difficult to decipher, Malchiodi (1998) offers possible suggestions to address the situation. First, children may not be excited about the drawing process if they sense a lack of enthusiasm from the therapist, teacher or researcher from which the assignment originated. The instructor's feelings, attitudes, and confidence can affect children's desire to draw and create art, and thus should be noted with considerable attention. Also, Malchiodi (1998) suggests that something as simple as poor quality art supplies may inhibit the children's desires to draw. Thus, "drawing materials that are in good shape and are visually exciting to use will go a long way to encourage children to engage in art making and self-expression" (Malchiodi, 1998, p. 57). In addition, children may exhibit resistance for personal reasons such as worry, mistrust of the researcher, depression, insecure feelings concerning their drawing abilities, and anxiety. Building rapport with the children, creating an accepting environment, and allowing oneself to be open to adapting the drawing activity for resistant children, (perhaps by making it a cooperative drawing activity involving both the researcher and the children), may all be helpful suggestions in helping children to engage in drawing. In this project, a semi-cooperative drawing approach was needed with one participant, where I essentially sat with the youth and helped to brainstorm some

ideas. Using the youth's words I copied ideas down on paper for the participant as a reminder of our brainstorming so that the finished creation could be designed by the youth at home. Also, the freedom to be open to various sources of drawing media was highly beneficial as one participant chose to submit his drawings via e-mail using a Paint Shop Software program on his computer.

Ideally, a time frame longer than the one-week allotment for the assignment in which the children could reflect and complete their drawings may have lent better representation of the children's experiences. Added time would have helped to guard against any variables that may have affected the kinds of pictures the youths drew in a given week. For example, the moods, the weather, or abnormal events occurring within their week may provide a tendency for the children to draw different pictures than they would on an "average" week. However, due to the time constraints and feasibility of this project, the children were limited to a one-week time frame to visually express their thoughts and perceptions of physical activity and sport settings.

At the end of the information session, the youths and their parents were provided the opportunity to ask questions. When all questions were addressed, the youths and their parents were thanked for their attention and time, and the session ended for the week. I called the participants two days before the next week's session to remind them to bring their completed drawings to the activity program. All of the youths and their parents/guardians gave written permission for me to publish the drawings that have resulted from this study in future work.

Individual interviews. Next, I involved each participant in two one-on-one semi-structured interviews, as well as a follow-up checking interview scheduled shortly after

the initial interviews had been completed. During their secondary school years, youths similar to the participants in this study have demonstrated the capacity to express themselves, set goals, make and understand the consequences of their choices, and learn from their experiences (Wehmeyer, Sands, Doll, & Palmer, 1997). It was therefore assumed that they would be able to contribute to the interviews effectively. Each interview took place in the facility where the specialized program was offered. The data obtained from the interviews were recorded using an audio tape recorder and new blank tapes that were labeled with pseudonyms for each participant before the start of each session. Each interview lasted approximately 45-minutes to 1-hour, and the follow-up checking interview generally took less time than the initial two interviews, approximately 30-minutes. In two instances where the first two interviews were especially lengthy, the third interview was used as a continuation interview from the first two. After completing the primary interview content, the final interview then proceeded to function as a checking or summary session with the youths to revisit prominent topics and clarify my understanding of their experiences.

On the date of the initial interview, I greeted and thanked both the participant and his or her parent/guardian for the opportunity to meet with the youth outside of the youth's regularly scheduled program time. Both parties were then reminded of the intention of the interview and of their voluntary status and freedom to withdraw from the project at any time without consequence. I then offered to answer any questions that either person had at that time. After doing so, I escorted the participant to a separate area to begin the interview process. The first part of the initial interview involved questions about the youth's drawings, and the youth was invited to share his or her thoughts on the

drawings and to tell me all about the pictures. This process was beneficial to both the youth and myself. I received the benefit of hearing the youths' stories about their creations, and the significance of the drawings to them. Also, simply asking the youths about their drawings encouraged them to elaborate on details beyond the obvious visual content of the drawings themselves. "For many children, drawing actually leads to wanting to share information that they might not otherwise disclose, especially if they feel comfortable with the creative activity or directive provided" (Malchiodi, 1998, p. 48). By speaking about their drawings, children gain the experience of expressing themselves, and are presented with the chance to grow through the process of the creative activity within the framework of the project (Malchiodi, 1998, p. 50). Furthermore, the participants had an audience to hear their stories when they told the meaning of their drawings, and I suspect that this might have helped to reassure the youths that their thoughts and feelings were valued contributions to their interaction with me. Whenever the youths needed a helping hand to get started, I asked them to describe their pictures based on similar inquiry used by Malchiodi (1998) for interpreting children's drawings (see Appendix G). Considerable caution was exercised in order to allow the youths ample time to express their thoughts, and although the drawing discussion was expected to occur during the first interview, I also displayed the youths' drawings for them at all subsequent interviews in case they wished to elaborate on their drawing contents further or refer to them in future interviews.

Following the discussion of the participants' drawings, I asked a series of questions for interviewing students that were adapted from Ellis (1998b). The adapted guide began with questions that were very open ended and general at first, and progressed

to more specific questions about participation experiences in physical activity and sport settings (see Appendix H). This process has been noted as a funnel approach by qualitative researchers (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The interview was only partially planned beforehand so that I could use the beginning questions to learn what the important questions were going to be for the youths. As described by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), I expected that the important components of the data picture would take shape as I examined and collected the parts through the children's responses and descriptions.

After each participant's initial interview, I transcribed the interview verbatim and studied it in an effort to re-live the interview with the participant and identify any unclear statements that may have been presented. As the interview guide spanned many areas of inquiry for each youth to respond to, I did not expect all of the material outlined in the guide to be covered during the first interview. To this effect, I ensured that the second interview was arranged with all participants shortly after the first one in order to have an opportunity to further develop an appreciation for the youths' sport experiences. Thirdly, a member checking (summary session) was arranged with the participants after the second interview was transcribed to check that the information gathered in the first two interviews was perceived correctly. This time was also used to ask the participants if they had any further reflections to add to their original remarks.

Finally, after all of the interviews and checking exercises were completed for all participants, I continued to volunteer with the youth sport program for personal reasons and was able to continue to informally observe and casually interact with the participants. Continued contact with the participants helped me to develop a refined understanding of the perceptions, motivations, likes, dislikes and overall experiences of the participants

included in this study. I originally intended to involve three of the participants in additional sharing sessions, however, time constraints as well as re-scheduling of the program due to a combination of holidays and inclement weather prohibited any formal involvement of three particular participants in additional study.

Evaluating the research

Researchers working within the Interpretivist Paradigm assume that "reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed and measured as in (some) quantitative research" (Merriam, 1998, p. 202). In following, researchers working within the Interpretivist Paradigm fittingly assert that there is not just one correct interpretation of the structures, meanings, or context of narratives. Rather, an author's intent in interpreting a text is best understood with an appreciation for their culture and time. Consequently, the importance of bringing a researcher's forestructure to the attention of those in positions to evaluate the work becomes paramount. Taylor (1985b, p. 24 as cited in Packer & Addison, 1989, p. 282) speaks succinctly to this reasoning, noting that "ultimately, a good explanation is one in which makes sense of the behavior; but then to appreciate a good explanation, one has to agree on what makes good sense; what makes good sense is a function of one's readings; and these in turn are based on the kind of sense one understands".

Persuasiveness of Interpretive works is not then a matter of demonstrating how one has reached an objective reality, but instead is better understood as a process through which the researcher guides the reader through any claims of trustworthiness relating to their interpretations of informed accounts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). While there are no

specific rules that confer credibility, a strategy often used by researchers to help guide their readers through their thought and interpretive processes is to simply make the research process visible, allowing systematic scrutiny (Hill Bailey, 1996). To this effect, the current paper presents situational forestructure that helped to engage me in this project; data in the form of texts used in the analysis; portions of original transcripts for review; all original drawings created by the participants in the present study; methods that have informed the processes used to transform the texts into findings and uncover meaning; and illustrative portions of interpretation on behalf of my participants and myself. I anticipate that consideration of these materials will help the reader evaluate the persuasiveness of the interpretations I have made.

Consistent with Heidegger's (1962) stance on what constitutes a good interpretation, the findings presented in this paper will not provide validated knowledge per se, or timeless truth, but instead provide further direction regarding the practical concern that originally motivated my inquiry – namely, the experience of youths with disabilities in places which afford physical activity, recreation, sport and exercise.

CHAPTER 4

Results: Monday Night at the Centre

The following chapter is an organization of many of the mediums through which I have come to know the youths in this project. As I had originally known the youths through a coach-athlete relationship prior to collecting any intentional data with them, I have not attempted to analyze their offerings without accounting for my previous experiences with them. Consistent with the practices of interpretive research, I have used all experiences and knowledge that I have gained in working with the youths in order to form my understandings of the intricacies of their lives. The forestructure writing in Chapter 1 highlighted the lenses with which I undertook this project. Additionally, the time I spent with the youths both at the specialized activity program (to be described shortly), and in other related environments, has contributed to the informed perceptions I currently have of their life experiences and the significance of various forms of physical activity within their lives as a whole.

Working with the Data

After transcribing the individual interviews of the participants verbatim, I read through each participant's transcripts a number of times in search of dominant topics, as well as repeated words and phrases (Scott & Usher, 1999). I noted these in the margin of the transcript, and also wrote key words or general phrases next to any quoted sections that were particularly lengthy in order to help locate the specific information in subsequent readings of the transcripts. Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to the process by which researchers simplify their data in this way as data reduction; however, unlike

the suggestions of Miles and Huberman (1994) I did not exclude any data from my analysis process during this phase of transcript analysis.

In following, I consciously focused on what the youths did not choose to speak about in addition to topics that seemed salient to them. For example, several youths shared few stories of age-appropriate friends in their narratives despite having ample opportunity to talk about individual relationships during our interviews. Caveats such as these were noted (when appropriate) for consideration during later readings of the transcripts and further sense-making of the data (Scott & Usher, 1999).

After scouring the transcripts for potential gaps in the youths' narratives, I then went back through the transcripts in search of place experiences that seemed prominent for each youth. For example, one participant spoke at length about the experiences she had in the fields at her Aunt's farm. I noted that this was an experience with an outdoor place. For all participants, I continued to identify the places that each youth spoke about, and wrote cues such as "specialized" or "outdoor", for example, to help codify the places of importance to each youth. Throughout the process of identifying places, it became evident that the youths' stories centered mainly around four places in their lives (to be discussed shortly). I color-coded each of the four places across all the participants with pink, blue, yellow and green markers to help clearly identify instances where each youth spoke of these four places.

At this stage, I began to synthesize all of the information I was conscious of knowing for each youth into several compressed data sets, a process that Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to as data display. I configured the events and happenings offered by each one of the participants into miniature plots and stories according to salient topics

and places outlined by each youth (Ellis, 1998b). This process helped me to make sense of all of the pieces and parts of data I had collected as they related to the youths' lives as a whole. Referring to the methods of Polkinghorne (1995), I searched the transcripts, creative drawings, field notes, and my memory of observations and interactions that had taken place for data that revealed the uniqueness of each individual participant and provided an understanding of each youth's complexity. I then summarized the youths' experiences in a highly-condensed form for personal use, and also wrote an accompanying reflection of the perceptions I had concerning the interconnectedness of each of the youths' experiences of physical activity and sport settings within their overall lives. This step was helpful in organizing my thoughts such that I was then prepared to coherently present the resultant findings.

Understanding the Findings

Before delving into specific topical areas that the youths shared with me, it is important that the reader become acquainted with the specialized program through which my relationship with these youth began, and be introduced to the youths themselves. It will also be useful for the reader to have an appreciation for the *kinds* of relationships the youths and I had together in order to understand the interesting dynamic of my multiple roles as volunteer, coordinator, instructor, researcher, friend, etc., while I participated in the activity program with the youths. To this end, I have created four literary sections with the intent of providing an *emic* or "insider's perspective" to a selection of noteworthy elements captured via collective participation by both the youths and myself within the activity program. The following sections are fictional in that the described material was not captured on tape or transcribed via precise video transcription during

interactions with the youths. However, the contents represent a realistic amalgamation of my perceptions, averaged over the course of months while working with the youths and are presented in a concise manner.

In the pages that follow, *Backstage Pass* is a representation of the personal dialogue that I might have had while preparing for the activity session on any given night just before the youths arrived at the centre. Here, I introduce some of my thoughts about the program, the facility itself, and also the youths in this study. Inspired by the writing style of Halas (2001), the second section, *Getting Ready* is a collection of vignettes I created about each youth based on information I have learned about them throughout our two year relationship, including specific information they shared with me during their individual interviews. I compiled several sources (over a number of weeks and activity sessions) to write a short snapshot about a typical day in the life of each of the youths *before* they left their homes to come to the activity program. While the vignettes themselves are fictional, the content of the stories largely represent my interpretations of information that each youth had shared with me. *The Welcoming* (section three) refers to one of my favorite parts of the program. Usually spanning only fifteen minutes, it marked the time period from when the first youth showed up for the program, to the moment that the last youth arrived. During *the welcoming*, I always stood outside the doors leading to the fitness centre, in the hallway waiting for the participants to arrive. Every week I marveled at the large amount of information I was privy to, like: who came and who didn't show, who dropped each youth off that night and whether or not the youths' parent(s)/guardian(s) walked their child right to the door, the apparent mood of each youth as they entered the hallway leading to the centre, significant events in each youth's

personal and school life that the youths shared with me on their way through the doors, etc. My ceremonial acknowledgment of each youth at the door was a routine I developed during the time that I coached the program. This section invites the reader to observe a typical night at welcoming time. Lastly, I offer my own thoughts as a seasoned volunteer of each youth while they are at the program during a weight training session. Standing back as an observer, I describe a string of possible thoughts that I may have had while looking around room at the youths on any night at *The Program*.

Monday Night at the Centre – Backstage Pass

Whoa. The key worked on the first try tonight – I didn't even have to jiggle it. Maybe it's a sign: tonight's going to be a breeze? I hope we don't have any surprise allergic reactions this week... I can't believe we actually had to use that dusty old Emergency Eye Wash Station last week. "We"? Yah right Jill. It was definitely way worse for Amanda! She was so brave. Guess you never know... Lights, right. Lights, lights... why can't I ever remember where that switch is? It's not like it's a big room or anything. Oomph! I should have guessed that chair would be there... it must be so hard to be blind. Ah! Here we are! That's better!

Now. What to do first? Hmmm. Jacket and toque off for starters. It feels like a sauna in here! Where is that coming from? Why would Mack have the heat so high? Oh right, they've been doing some work on the pool down the hall this week, I remember him telling me last time. The pool gallery doors were probably open earlier today. Hope the kids are dressed for it tonight. It's almost sticky feeling in here. I wonder who'll be coming? I'll get all of their programs and clip boards out of the filing cabinet anyways. It's easier to put them away than rifle through the drawers looking for the right ones later. Crapper! Looks like Mack forgot to write this week's programs in for the kids. I forgot to remind him, shoot. Oh well, no big deal. We can just fly by the seat of our pants and use last week's as a guide – that should save us some time and the kids can get right to it. I'll just write the date in on the top of them and the volunteers can help them fill it in if they need it. Where's that little pencil holder thingy that I like so much? Ah-ha! They

can grab one of these when they come in too... I'll just leave everything on this bench here.

I wonder who those people are in the birthday pictures hanging over the free weights? They must be in one of the daytime training programs. Nice idea – it must make those people feel kinda special. I think those have been up there for a while though – it can't still be their birthdays... a little out-dated I bet. Probably like a lot of the pictures and posters on the walls. Well, at least in the weight room for sure. I think the staff has been trying to put up a couple of new pieces here and there in the cardio room. I like it when they cut out these stories and pictures from the newspapers. It helps the groups of people that use this facility realize what's possible and shows them that these are just regular people too. I think this guy used to train here, isn't he playing wheelchair rugby now? Think so. We've gotta get him to come in as a guest speaker for our rugby session with the kids. What's this email that's printed off and taped to the wall all about? Oh right, must be from that girl who used to work here but is traveling in Europe now. I think I would do that too; write and try to keep in touch. It must be hard to just pack up and leave the people she's worked with for so long. She was so fun and cheery. They must really miss having her around.

Hmmm... the treadmill is "out of order"? That's odd; it was working two days ago. Wonder what happened to it? Hope nothing like that day when I watched Roger trip and fall off the end – I still feel badly about that. I just couldn't get to him in time though. I wasn't even volunteering here then – I just came in to talk to Mack that day... I remember. It looked like it hurt so much. Lucky that Alicia's never tripped on it – her feet almost look like they're going to catch every time she takes a step on it but they never quite hit. It's good for her to do some work without her crutches though. Well, Alicia will have to warm up on the bike today instead. She's pretty easy going, she probably won't even care. Actually, she'll probably like hanging out there with James on his bike. She never gets to talk to anyone when they're warming up 'cause the treadmill faces the wall. Which reminds me, where's that strap we usually use to keep James' foot on the bike pedal? Oh there it is, hanging off the handle bars. Ok.

I wonder if they're even going to fix that old clunker. That's the centre's only treadmill. It would be so great if they could get a new one. The ones in the gym

downstairs are so much nicer. I wish we could take the kids down there. Another bike would be great too to add to the lonely three there in the middle. Those arm cranks on the wall are kind of archaic too. I think there's only one with a timer that works. People are still using them and getting a sweat on though so I guess they can't be all that bad. Well, I guess some more than others... Kelsey usually slows right down when she thinks I'm not looking. Heh. Funny. I should put the overhead TV on Much Music there so the kids can rock out. I love watching them just groove in their chairs while they're over here warming up. The tiny button is so high up and so hard to reach though... there!

What time is it? 6:15pm...hmmm... Tracey's usually the first one here. I wonder who's bringing her tonight? Probably DATS. I think that's how her family's been doing it lately... DATS drops her off, they pick her up. Those buses are always such a gamble. It must be so inconvenient that she always has to be ready to go anywhere up to 45 minutes before she really wants to leave. I know if that were me I would get a little weary of that kind of schedule after a while. I guess maybe if the choice is that or stay home, I'd rather be going out too. Right. Well, I guess I've got a few more minutes to get my water bottle filled up – I'm going to the good fountain around the corner though, not the one where the water's all warm and cloudy. Yuck. It should be ok to leave the doors open for just a second... the volunteers will be here soon anyways. Don't want them to think nobody's here yet. Wait a second. Where's my jacket? Oh yeah, I hung it up when I first came in. It's gotta be the chlorine smell and the humidity in here...

Getting Ready

Movin' to the beats. *Now, what else did I want to bring tonight? I've got my new jacket, ya this looks so good! I can't wait to see what Corey thinks of it. I hope he works with me tonight. Him, or maybe Susan – or Jill! But I really like Corey, he's so cute! I want them to see my cool sunglasses too, so I'm bringing those...I'll just wear them on my head...*

"Tracey! Are you ready yet?! Your ride is here!" *What is she doing down there?!? Jeez!*

"Listen, Donna, I just can't wait for her any longer – I've got a group of little old bitties that need to get to their BINGO game tonight. You're going to have to take her. If she's going next week, tell her to make sure she's ready for me, ok?

"No really, just give her another second, I'm sure she's almost ready… Tracey!"

"I'd really like to, but I just can't. Tell her I said 'hey' and she'll have to tell me all about it next week – see ya later."

"Alright, (sigh) I'll have to talk to her, *again.* Have a good night".

Now, one last look… What am I forgetting? My peppermint gum – don't want to get too close without that! I've got it! Music! That's what I am forgetting! Gotta bring this new CD that my brother made for me, maybe they can help me figure out some new moves…

(Bang! Bang! Bang!) "Tracey! What are you doing in here! I asked you to come to the door five minutes ago! Now Al had to leave without you and you're probably going to be late – *if* we even make it there! You *know* what our car situation is like! It's probably not even going to start! And how am I going to be able to see out the back? Your chair doesn't fit in the trunk – God, I wish we could get you one that folds down easier. Jeez, Tracey! Get your head out of the clouds and pull your act together! I'll be outside *freezing* while I'm warming up the car – get moving!"

Get your act together… meh, meh, meh (sound effects)! I'll be freezing… whatever. I don't care if I'm late anyways. It's not my fault that Al comes before I'm ready. So where was I? Oh yeah – the music! Too bad we don't have a CD player in the car, we could have listened to it all the way there…

Food for thought. Amanda's family is together at the kitchen table having dinner. Amanda is wheeled up to the long end of the table and is discreetly trying to feed her new puppy some green beans under the table while the rest of her family tends to their own meals. The five o'clock news is echoing faintly from the stereo in the living room.

"So what'd you do at school today, Amanda?" her mother asks while pouring the milk. "Anything exciting?"

"No, not really. Well, I guess if you count that we had a substitute for Mrs. Tweeny again – that's something different"

"She's been sick a lot this year, hasn't she? Did you have Mr. Locke again?"

"No, some new teacher, I forget her name. But, Justin and Peter were being goofy again and they made everyone else start acting up" Amanda said laughing. "Nobody wanted to do any work and then Mr. MacDonald came in and we all got in trouble. Justin and Peter had to go to the office." Realizing she may have said too much, Amanda turned her focus to her plate and started cutting her chicken.

"Well what were you doing to get in trouble by Mr. MacDonald?" her father pipes in while clinking his utensils on the edge of his plate. "We've talked about this before, Amanda. I don't want you getting involved in those shenanigans!"

"I *wasn't* involved, dad! It wasn't me! It was everybody else, I'm *always* good for the substitute teachers! I was helping her to take attendance and stuff, and I went around with her at recess!" Amanda says with a whine.

"I still don't want you getting in trouble with Mr. MacDonald. He's busy enough and doesn't need to be spending his time scolding you!"

"Dad! I know! That was like, a year ago and that wasn't even my fault! Remember? Mom?! Tell him!" she pouts, referring to a time when Justin and Peter were poking her and calling her names behind Mrs. Tweeny's back. She retaliated and ended up having to explain herself to Mr. MacDonald at the office while Justin and Peter cried in front of their parents.

"I know, I know, but you're tougher than that, remember? You don't need to even entertain them! Those boys are never going to understand you. Kapishe?" her father says sternly.

"Fine, but I know that. Kapishe." Amanda replies with a sigh, feeling slightly defeated.

Afterschool.com. James' class finished early for the afternoon. His teacher gave them the last five minutes to do whatever they wanted before the end-of-day bell…

The class scatters in every direction. A group of boys grab the class football and take off running to play on the tarmac just outside the classroom window. There's a couple girls giggling around Kristen's desk, who just got her hair cut on the weekend. A few others are at their own desks starting to work on their homework for the day. James thinks: *What's left for me to do?* Instinctively turning around, James notices that both computers at the back of the room are free. He checks the clock overhead, wondering if he has time to chat for a minute before his bus comes. *Ben hates it when I'm the last one on the bus*... Logging on to his favorite chat room (but not without typing a few wrong letters first), James realizes that all of the people he usually chats to are still in school. *Darn it. I wish I went out with the football guys.* The bell rings. The classroom is empty and quiet except for the sound of the computer shutting down and James zipping up his backpack.

Shopping 101. "What do you think?" Joan says to Kelsey as she poses with an elaborate wide-brimmed hat in the busy store.

"Ha, ha! Kind of reminds me of 'Pretty Woman'! What do you think of this one, mom?" laughs Kelsey as she tries on the closest hat she can reach - a helicopter beanie.

Sarcastically, Joan replies: "Cute, Kelsey. Very cute. I think your father would approve! Ha, ha!"

"Speaking of dad… maybe we should get *him* a new hat to replace that one that he left at Castaway Quay on our Disney cruise last year? He still talks about it!" says Kelsey as she puts her beanie down and wheels over to the men's section.

"I dunno… you know how fussy he can be! And besides, he might think we were trying to make a hint that he should be covering up his 'thin spot'! Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha! Ya! I think he forgets that he's not shooting hoops in high school anymore! He used to have such an afro back then!" Kelsey chuckles, making a balloon-like gesture over her head.

"Oh shoot! Look what time it is Kelsey! I'm glad you reminded me! We've still got to get some dinner into you before you go to the Centre tonight – aren't *you guys* doing basketball tonight?"

"Thankfully no." Kelsey sighs with wide eyes. "It's a weights night tonight."

"Oh that's right, I forgot what day it was." Joan replies absent mindedly, shaking her head. "Don't forget to take that sheet in for Jill to sign tonight when you go, ok? I want to send it in to your gym teacher tomorrow."

"The school credits one, right? Ya, I already have it in my chair pocket, ready to go". Kelsey says, pulling the sheet out from behind her.

"Good, well let's get movin' here before your father and brother starve to death!" Joan laughs and steps toward the door, holding it open for Kelsey.

"They're probably playing video games together and don't even realize it's supper time! Those two!" Kelsey teases after wheeling through the door and they both start off toward their car in the parking lot, the closest one to the store.

Peace and quiet. Alicia is laying belly-down on her bed, reading a new book after finishing dinner. With her chest propped up on a pillow, she escapes with the characters to faraway places that she dreams of traveling to some day. She is finished her math homework already and reads silently to herself while her fish tank hums along softly with her sister's piano playing in the background. Her room is a tidy nook of books, photos she's collected, and scrapbook pages. She's also got a few free-floating pages of drawings that she's been working on that are spread out on her desk with little eraser bits sprinkled over top of them. She was just about to read about a secret passage that her book characters had found in the Egyptian Pyramids when her father knocked lightly and reminded her that it was time to leave for the Centre. Folding her bookmark into the page for later, she places her book onto her nightstand and bends sideways over her bed to pick up her arm crutches. With one smooth swing of her feet she is standing up, looking for her scarf and mittens.

The Welcoming

After having a few laughs and catching up with the volunteers I alert them to the small change in plans (Mack not remembering to fill out the kids' programs) just in time for our first arrival of the evening…

Hmmm… Amanda's never here before Tracey. I wonder if Tracey's even coming tonight? I never heard from her to say otherwise… Oh! Amanda's mom is with her! I

almost never get to see her – I wonder if her dad's got any new courses he'll have to study for tonight like he usually does? I don't see any papers in his hands...

"Hey Amanda! How's it going, girl?!" as I jump into her wheelchair and on to her lap, giving her a bear hug, her mom and dad looking on, smiling... it's part of our welcoming ritual.

"Good, good! We have a play this week at school and I've had to practice really hard for it, I'm so pooped but it's this Friday and it's going to be really great. My choir's doing some songs for it too and we've had to stay in at lunch to work on our songs"

I stand up so I can see her better. "Wow! That sounds fun! Are you looking forward to it?"

"Ya, but I always get a little nervous. The whole school's going to be there you know, even my teachers and the Principal!"

"Neat! Well I won't have you working your mind too hard in here tonight, you're just going to have to work at getting those arms good and strong – you can't be that track diva without those!" I say, giving her a playful poke in the shoulder. "Might as well start warming up – the others should be here any second now"

"Hoh-kay" Amanda says with a fake sigh, waving to her mom and dad with a smile as she wheels into the cardio room. I talk with her mom and dad long enough to find out that they're having a tea date tonight while Amanda's at the program. They thank me for giving her a little nudge and are on their way.

I wonder what time her play is on Friday – I bet she would be so thrilled if I just showed up for it. But maybe not. Maybe I'd be crossing "the line". I dunno. I would still like to see it though...

"Yo sista'!!" a curly haired girl yells from the other end of the hall.

"Hey Tracey! I wondered if you were coming tonight! Amanda's already here – it's really odd that you weren't the first one. What gives?"

"All I have to say, is DATS." Tracey says with attitude while rolling her eyes and crossing her arms.

"Oh! I see." *I can tell there's more to this story...a response like that is usually secret code for: 'don't ask me. It wasn't my fault.' She seems a little touchy.* "So who's coming back for you tonight? Your mom or your dad?"

"Neither. My brother and his girlfriend. I really like her!" she says with a big smile, her tone changing drastically.

"That's good! It would be no fun at all if you *didn't* like her, huh?"

"Nope, no way. She knows lots of dance moves too, sometimes she teaches me" Tracey says proudly and starts swaying back and forth in her chair seeming to feel some music from deep inside.

"Oh ya" I say nodding my head "Well how 'bout you get those moves just a groovin' in there with Amanda? I put Much Music on for you guys to rock to" I say with a knowing nod and smiling eyes. With an excited look, she wheels off to find Amanda.

I wonder what happened with DATS, and why her mom or dad didn't come in with her tonight when they dropped her off? Humph. Maybe they were in a rush or something. Probably nothing.

I look up and smile, seeing both Kelsey and James coming down the hall together, a parent of each trailing along behind. I notice that James has no gloves or hat on and I can't resist the opportunity to tease him for a second. Smirking, I sing out to him from down the hall:

"So James, it's freezing out there – what's with you not wearing any gloves or a hat?" *This should be good. What's he going to come up with for me tonight? Ha! He's smiling too, he must have a good one.*

"Well, some of us can't just pull our nappy hair back in a pony tail to hide it, now can we?" he says smartly, swishing my hair with his hand when he gets closer. "Some of us don't want our hair to look like *yours* when it's been in a hat, so we choose not to wear one"

Ouch! Almost choking on the swig of water I just took, I laughed through my nose and smiled at him. "You must have just been sitting on that one, hey pal? That was a good zinger!" tipping my head in his direction and winking at his dad.

"Ya, you just don't know who you're dealing with!" James says triumphantly walking away from me and into the cardio room, not giving me a chance to reply.

"That *was* a good one" I say, half-intending to sound as if it were under my breath, getting a little chuckle out of the crowd that is still standing with me in the hall. His dad tells me he'll be back for James later and is still laughing to himself half-way down the hall as he flashes me a backwards wave.

Too funny. The man of many words, ha! He loved it!

"Hey Kelsey! Sorry that you had to witness that atrocity!" I say, straightening my shirt like Charlie Chaplain and winking at her. "How's your week been going?"

"Good" She says nodding and smiling at me for a little longer than usual.

"Ya? Did you go out to your Aunt's farm last weekend?"

"Nah, my Nan was in town so we all just kind of had a family weekend *in.* Played board games and stuff – she's so good at scrabble that we ended up having a Scrabble tournament that lasted two days!"

I look up and see her mother smiling and nodding along with weary eyes. I smile, knowing that she wanted *me* to see that, but not Kelsey. "Ha! I was never any good at that game, but I *do* like board game nights!"

"Ya, we do too." She says smiling, but drifting off a little.

She must really love her Nan to pieces. Not many other kids her age are that excited to spend a weekend playing scrabble with their grandmothers! She's totally thinking about her weekend right now. That's awesome. I wonder how my grandfather's doing?

Snapping out of it, I look up and see Kelsey's mom talking quietly to her right by the door as they hang Kelsey's jacket up. The only part I hear is Kelsey saying: "I won't forget mom! I won't forget". Her mom smiles and walks toward me, telling me that she'll be back in an hour and a half and that she has her cell phone on "just in case". I smile and nod, waving good-bye.

She always says that. It's kind of nice, but she's kind of a worry wart. Sometimes I wonder if she trusts me to take care of Kelsey or if she acts like that to everyone. I hope Kelsey spreads her wings a little – I know her mom would like it if she did, but she's going to have to let Kelsey do her thing without her if that's going to happen...

Hmmm, it's 6:40pm and still no Alicia. Ten more seconds and I bet she'll come strolling off that elevator, just like clock-work...Ten, nine, eight... Ha! What did I say?!

"Hey Alicia! Right on time, as usual" I say, teasing her and smiling.

"Ya, ya" She says smiling "You know, I'd rather be in bed!"

"Ya, I know! We've been over this before." I smirk, winking at her "But didn't we decide that you were going to turn into a pumpkin if you slept all the time?"

"Ya, I guess" Alicia musters, looking at the floor and smiling.

Funny. She uses that sleeping line a lot. It's almost like that's her thing with me and she can't abandon it even though she doesn't really even have that lethargic attitude that she plays up. "Easy going" better describes her demeanor, not lethargic. Hmmm...

"So what's up?" I ask, waiting for my weekly update

"The ceiling" she says dryly, chuckling to herself and waiting for my response.

Ha, ha. Right. I set myself up for that one, I should have seen it coming – she pulls that one on me every time. I'm going to have to try harder to remember next time!

"Rah, rah! Ok, you got me!" swaying my head side to side with a smile. "Really, what's new?"

"Nothing much. I've got tons of tests this week – one every day, I think. So I'm going to have lots of studying to do"

"Boo, that doesn't sound like much fun at all. Well at least you get to burn off the stir-craziness from studying while you're here this week – Thursday's even a swimming night so it'll be perfect timing for you!"

I know how much she enjoys the swimming sessions. I love this little game we play where I try to get her excited and she plays the non-responsive mime.

Alicia tries hard not to give in, but then can't help cracking a smile: "Ya, that should be good! I'll have to remember that so I can tell my dad where we're going on Thursday".

"I'll make sure I remind him later tonight when I see him" I call after her, as she makes her way to her treadmill by the wall. Realizing that it is broken, she shrugs and decides to join James on the bikes for her warm up, without a word.

Funny. I knew she would do that.

The Program

Right, ok. So everyone's got a volunteer paired up with them tonight – that's perfect. I love it when I can just be a "floater". It's so fun just having a chance to talk with the kids when I'm not working with just one of the group members. I like cheering them on one-on-one, but I always kind of worry about not spending equal time cheering the others on when I am working one-on-one with somebody. Actually, maybe the kids don't mind at all. Who knows? It's probably just me. I guess I just feel a little bit guilty. I only get to see them once a week in the weight room, and I just feel like I should be buzzing around the whole time. I would feel horrible if one of them was dying to tell me something, but then I just didn't get to them...It's kind of too bad that I don't get to do this more often. I mean, float around like this, be a fly on the wall sometimes. But then I guess I can't really expect every volunteer to come all of the time. They've got demanding University schedules too, and before long, final exams will be just around the corner... I'll have to see if I can get some of the girls to come out on the nights that we're a little short...

Look at Alicia. Just doing her own thing, working away with her walkman on. She doesn't even need a volunteer but I think she just likes having someone to chat with in between her sets. Jeez, I remember what she used to be like when she first started coming

here... huh. Feels like forever ago – she's not even the same person now. She's so self-sufficient and independent now. What a change! I bet some of the other kids who come here kind of look up to her, she's such a great role model for them. Ha! Ya, except when she's wimping out with such a light leg press like that! She can press so much more and she knows it! She must just be reading the numbers that Mack had on the sheet from last week— Ha, ha! She saw me smirking and shaking my head at her. That's right girl, you know you can work harder – you're barely breaking a sweat! That's better. It's not like she won't do it, it's just that she'll try to get away with it if she can... kind of a game she plays, even though I know she likes being here and working out – it's like she's just waiting for me to notice! Ha, funny.

Now there's another double trouble set... Tracey and James. Those two will not push themselves hard unless they've got someone standing there coaching and cheering them with every rep... but they'll do it if you're giving them your full attention. Ya, they'll work super hard if you're standing right over them but they'll just sit there otherwise. You really gotta watch! Almost like they're just waiting to be nudged. Wait.. now what's Tracey doing? That's a pretty bouncy looking leg curl... I'll have to remind Trisha to keep her eye out for Tracey doing that. I like it when Tracey and Trisha are paired up. They really get along well and Trisha will just let Tracey tell her stories all night long, being the world's best listener the whole time. I know Tracey totally loves that attention.

James likes his attention too, but only from certain people and only in specific instances. I'm pretty sure before he worked with Corey a couple of times, he felt a little threatened. He wasn't sure what to make of him. Corey's a cool guy, University student, the girls kid around with him – some of the girls in our program even have a crush on him. And then there's James, he's used to getting a different kind of attention, when he's in school especially, but I'll bet he has at least once wished that he could be in Corey's shoes. It's interesting how James reacts sometimes. I can poke fun and play around with him, but anyone that he doesn't know that well can't just jump in and do the same. He ends up getting offended and angry with them. Anger's the perfect word. Sometimes it seems like it's out of nowhere, and nobody knows why. I think he's got a lot of that stored up inside. A ticking time-bomb. I almost wish we incorporated some practical life-skills with this program that would be ideal for helping him cope with feeling frustrated and

yucky sometimes. Well, maybe not even just him, come to think of it, all of the kids could benefit from something like that. I just don't have the time to make those kinds of formal lesson plans or handouts though. Isn't that always the way? So many ideas, not enough time or energy anymore. But I really think they would respond well to that kind of stuff coming from this program. I'll have to talk to Mack to see if he thinks it would be a good addition to next year's program. Oh right, but I won't be here then. Well maybe they would still do it without me? Of course they would, Jillian. Don't be ridiculous...they would, right? Ya, I'm sure they would.

But wait a second, if I'm not here, who's going to sit on Amanda's lap when she comes to the program next year? She'll miss that won't she? I will. That will be so odd not to be coming here... Look at her working on her abs down there on the mat. I just feel awful that I haven't been able to figure out a different way for her to do those crunches yet... anything I think of is always so hard with her shunt and everything. Well, that, and it's always a process getting her to try something new. Her first answer is always "no, I can't" even if she's never tried it before. I wonder why she does that? I believe that she knows her body better than anyone... but, only to a point. Sometimes she won't even try and she gets pretty aggressive about saying "no" even when we know if she would just try she would see that she could do it. Then whoever is working with her ends up spending the next ten minutes calming her down and convincing her that we're not trying to make her do anything that is intended to hurt her. What's with that? Why all the anger? I don't know. It's so hard to tell. A lot of these kids bring their own little hidden "red buttons" with them here. If one of them gets set off, we're all left reeling trying to figure out why so we don't do "it" again.

The thought that they could all be little chameleons when they come here is pretty fascinating too. I mean, take Kelsey for instance. I can't stop thinking about that sheet I signed for her to be able to come here for her school gym credits because she wasn't getting enough activity at school. What must that have been like for her? Being in gym, but not really being part of anything. She comes here and works out, not all that hard, but she's consistent and she will try almost anything you ask of her. She smiles, has an overall positive attitude. Is a little quiet. Well, that's kind of a fib guess, because she talks about lots of things. I guess "soft-spoken" is more the word? But is that really what she's

like? Is she always that pleasing? I find it hard to believe that nothing has ever 'pushed her button'. Even Alicia has come here and vented before, but not very often! I don't know if I've ever heard Kelsey talk about anything that made her mad or upset before. But then again, have I ever really tried to ask her? I don't think I have...No wonder.

CHAPTER 5

Narrative Portraits of the Participants

After working with the data to create a unique plot that reflected the experiences of each individual youth, I found that the youths definitely shared thoughts relating to similar topical areas. For example, there were instances where the youths expressed differing thoughts about the experience of swimming and although their opinions were not always the same, swimming as a topical area was certainly evident. Clustering stories in this way (based on recurring topics in the youths' verbal reports), enabled me to study each cluster in order to discern whether thematic statements were revealed in the youths' preoccupations and salient thoughts (Ellis, 1998b).

To illustrate the clustering process I undertook, I have organized original quotes and created several sets of short narrative stories from the youths based on the collection of data I had access to. Although some topical areas between youths were similar, it is important to note that I have taken care to understand each individual youth as an individual. Their stories as a whole are not intended to be a generalization of all youths with disabilities. The narratives are intended as a literary vehicle in which I am able to demonstrate my understanding of the lives of *these* five youths with disabilities.

I caution that some of the stories will seem confusing at first. For example, there may be instances where two differing opinions about an activity have been demonstrated by the same child on two different occasions. Through a variety of examples, I attempt to reason that the topical areas highlighted by the youths are an indication of their feelings toward the places in their lives as well as their experiences with those places overall. Instead of devising a categorical scheme in which to place each of the youths'

experiences of physical activity and sport, I have aimed to understand how the sport and physical activity experiences of the youths in this project relate to the wider picture of their lives as a whole. In seeking to express physical activity as only one piece of their life puzzle, the interpreted experiences of the youths in this research project have been most holistically respected through the lense of *place*. *The place* in which an experience is cultivated seems to influence the meanings and perceptions of the experience by the youths.

Individual Participants – Topical Areas

Throughout my time in working with the youths in this study, several topical areas relating to their experiences of sport and physical activities seemed quite salient to them. Naturally, each youth had very individual experiences which they shared with me. This meant that each participant did not necessarily equally express interest in the same topical areas as the other participants I interviewed, and in fact, they may not have even commented on a topic that seemed prominent for another participant. Therefore, the following collection of quotes and stories should not be viewed as a cross-section of opinions pertaining to a given topic for generalization purposes. Instead, the outlined topical areas should be seen as a deliberate selection of activity-related experiences highlighted by each youth. Their stories and quotes act as a tailored tutorial in which we begin to understand and appreciate the meaning and significance of sport and physical activity experiences within their overall lives. Four topical areas emerged from the data including: Swimming, Specialized Activity Programs, School Physical Education and Outdoor Places. A comprehensive discussion and analysis of these areas specific to each

youth, as well as some general comments regarding the youths interviews overall, follow in this chapter.

Alicia

Alicia is a very independent person. She ambulates well with the aid of crutches and gets around wherever she needs to via her wheelchair when traveling long distances. As a high functioning adolescent with cerebral palsy, she does exceptionally well in all of her classes, and involves herself in a number of clubs, including: an after school activity program, her church group, and a leadership club at her school. Her parents stress the importance of Alicia's education and encourage her to do well in everything she does. While Alicia acknowledges her parents' influence, she does well because she wants to do well. She doesn't particularly like to do things just because other people tell her to. She takes ownership in the activities she is involved in and applies her efforts because the tasks are important to ***her***. For example, Alicia likes to draw and has taken art lessons outside of school in the past. Hearing this, I naturally asked Alicia if she takes art in school, to which she replied: "I don't like taking art in school. That's art for marks. It takes all of the fun out of it and I end up having to do what somebody else wants me to do".

Alicia described art class as a restricting place due to the teacher and the curriculum. Relating to this, a major underlying theme throughout Alicia's interviews revolved around her insistence that I understood her dislike for places, things and people that were personally and creatively *restricting*. Repeatedly during the course of our interviews, she recited a number of instances that made her feel restricted, as well as those that afforded feelings of freedom. She used to take piano lessons but quit because

she always felt like she was practicing for her parents, rather than for her own enjoyment. She related the artistic side of doing art and playing the piano for herself to school subjects that she likes because they challenge her, but doesn't like because she says: "they're just not *free*, you know? Like the maths and stuff. You have like formulas and numbers and 'do this' and 'do that', ya".

Alicia's feelings and thoughts relating to her participation in physical activities and sports conveyed a similar lack of enjoyment for feeling restricted. The stories Alicia offered concerning her activity participation used her participation in High School physical education as the measuring stick. In her High School physical education class, Alicia spends little time participating. Her High School physical education class as a place is restricting in a number of ways. Alicia told stories of how lack of accessibility to places like the weight room and fields for playing class sports limited what she can participate in, but also her participation was limited by other aspects as well. Specifically, Alicia's participation was additionally influenced by the interpersonal environment created by her interactions with other students and her teacher. In other words, the *people of the place* influenced Alicia's experience with physical education as well.

> "Um, well, there's the stuff with the arms that I can do like shooting a basketball, or badminton, or tennis. And then there's the ones which are like, soccer, and football and all the other field sports I guess, and track and field – can't really do that. Um, ya, and at my school there's a weight training place – and I could have done that but it's not adapted for wheelchairs, and there's only stairs so I can't really go up. So that kind of sucks. I just sit out for that too.... Ya um, it's difficult not being able to participate and watching others have fun while your sitting on the side.... I feel left out. Just sitting there, like, as an observer is not much different than sitting at home and watching T.V., and if I could participate I would! I guess the teachers have too much on their minds...they're kind of weary

and not really open I guess? It kind of annoys me but I can't really stereotype teachers much, I don't know what they're really thinking. And also sometimes the gym teacher doesn't even ask so I'm like: 'ho-kay!' Ya so, they don't really give me much thought. Whatever."

Alicia suggested that part of her exclusion from many of her gym class activities was due to the worn-out, tired and non-adaptive efforts of her gym teacher. Further, Alicia felt isolated from her classmates in the gym due to their attitudes toward her. At one point, while describing the drawing of her gym class playing soccer (see Appendix J), I asked Alicia about the other people in her picture who were drawn with no faces:

Jillian: "What would you say the attitudes of these people are *(pointing to the faceless players)* towards that person *(pointing to the girl in the wheelchair)*?"

Alicia: "I'd say they could care less right now. They're just not me. 'Go! Get the ball! Get it in the goal! Go! Go!' I don't know.... They're really that kind of uptight and not really open kind of people, so I don't know. I don't know what they think about me so I just think: 'whatever'. 'Say hi to me, sure I'll say hi to you' kind of thing'.... They don't care much. They just stay in their own little box or whatever they're in, so ya. They stay in their own little world – they don't really care much about others."

Jillian: "Hmm. So what's this person thinking *(pointing to the girl in the wheelchair)*?"

Alicia: "I don't know. 'Let's go swimming, let's go home', something like that. I dunno. 'I wish I had a book with me'. Ya. Just want to do anything else instead of sitting there, so."

The list of things Alicia describes she would rather do in place of being "On the Sidelines" in her High School gym class echoes the thoughts of able-bodied Junior High School youths in a study by Carlson (1995), where alienated students were those who would rather be anywhere other than physical education class. The place of Alicia's High

School gym class was unwelcoming and restricting to her in all of the elements that made up that place.

Contrasting her experience of High School gym, Alicia did not feel the same way at all in her Junior High gym class where Alicia felt more included in the class as a result of her teacher's actions and the other students' interactions with her.

> "Junior High was good because it was all one-level. Flat, and I could access everything, so I could join in and stuff.... My Junior High gym teacher, she could think up ideas and get me in and participate and stuff.... Like there was soccer – usually someone would push me around and I'd have like a broomball stick and I'd hit the ball when I had a chance. I was just like, 'ya!' She was a cool teacher".

Interestingly, whenever Alicia told stories of physically active places that she liked, they were discussed in contrast with the feelings of restriction noted by a number of illustrative examples such as her High School gym class. In fact, the places she liked most were those in which she associated feelings of being "free" and places which were "free" of negative attitudes, where "open-minded" people participated with her.

The swimming pool was one place that Alicia most definitely felt free. In her description of this place, she told of how swimming is "not as restrictive as other sports" and makes her feel lighter, like she could be floating on clouds (see also accompanying drawing, self-titled: "Splash!" in Appendix J).

> "I like to swim because, well, you don't necessarily need your legs for it – like if you have strong arms you can just swim, and ya. I can *do it*, and it's fun! Um, it's not as restrictive as some of the other sports that there are and there's usually no rules or anything, so you just do whatever.... When I'm in the pool, (the water) makes me feel lighter, so it's just like – wheeee! Ha, ha! I don't know, like, I could be on clouds – floating on clouds. It just makes me feel free, and all relaxed and everything, ya."

It is clear that the urge for freedom is salient to Alicia. She chose to draw herself skating for her second drawing (see Appendix O) where she is "Gliding on Ice" and is free from any restraint, rules or negative social interaction. There are no people in the stands, no one else is crowding the ice, and there is no sign of her wheelchair or crutches. She has drawn herself in a place that is free from so many things.

Alicia also saw the place where I was a volunteer coach as one that she liked because to her, the centre was welcoming and she was surrounded by "open-minded" people. It was interesting to hear Alicia focus on the physical, social, and personally motivating aspects of the specialized program. She talked about getting to know people, making friends, enjoying the feeling that she had improved her strength, the "adaptable" volunteers and adapted equipment. To Alicia, these were all things that made that place an enjoyable one. More specifically, I asked Alicia what her favorite part about doing sports and activities at the centre was and why she really liked being there, to which she replied:

> "Um, well for the group activities, it's like getting to know people? And ya, making new friends and stuff. And like, with weight training, there's like, self-satisfaction, and ya. Stuff like that.... Like feeling good after a workout and feeling like, 'good tired'. And feeling like I've improved.... And too, the other participants have disabilities too, so (I'm) kind of in a similar group here, and then the volunteers, you included, are very open minded, you know, very adaptable. Also, all the stuff here is all adapted for people with disabilities, so it's pretty good that way."

I found it curious that she did not mention the structured nature and potential restrictions of the program, as all youths were expected to warm-up well, stretch, and work on a pre-determined weights program. The main opportunity for choice the youths had was the

order they would like to do the exercises in. While seemingly routine in the way a gym class might be prepared, the combination of the people, positive physical features and personally meaningful elements of the place made this activity program different in Alicia's eyes.

Consistent with Alicia's drawings, where there are no other swimmers or people on the pool deck, no other skaters or people in the stands, and the soccer players on the field have no faces, all of her stories are vastly void of any people she refers to as friends. Two exceptions in Alicia's interviews are where she explains that "friends…well, they come and they go" and that she mostly hangs out with people at school when her class does group work.

Jillian: "I notice there's just you on the page there, right?"
Alicia: "Ya"
Jillian: "There's no one in the stands or anything, er…"
Alicia: "Nah…"
Jillian: "No?"
Alicia: "I think it's just, I like being by myself so, I think that represents it I guess. Yeeeeeah, I'm kind of isolated-ish"
Jillian: "Err… By choice, or, not by choice?"
Alicia: "I dunno. I'm just a pretty quiet and observing person"
Jillian: "You kind of keep to yourself?"
Alicia: "Ya. But I can open up when I want to, ha, ha!"

In the above little excerpt, Alicia avoided my question about whether she was isolated because she wanted to be, or because she had no choice, by responding with one of her personal qualities. But, in the next line, she gave me a sense that she could "open up" if she had the opportunity. Perhaps a helpful explanation to why Alicia drew no other people and did not speak of friendships is that opportunities to experience such stories

were uncommon for her. Perhaps opportunities to build friendships within the places of her life were scarce.

Deficiency in peer relationships in the lives of adolescents with disabilities has been referred to as a "Catch 22" (Weiss et al., 2003). Because of limited social competence, adolescents with disabilities are often excluded from many common peer situations. Consequently they may have less opportunity to learn the social skills needed for effective interactions, which can result in isolation and an inability to function as successfully as their able-bodied peers in the social environment (Anderson, Grossman, & Finch, 1983). It is quite possible that Alicia may have at one time been an example of this "Catch 22", but as she has matured and endured years of "alone time", she has also adopted an attitude that she now decides who she wants to try to be friends with and when. She is unwilling to invest time getting to know "close minded" people even if they are the only people around.

Outdoor places were not of particular prominence to Alicia either. She described brief recollections of outdoor recess but no other "active" outdoor experiences. She did however, mention landscapes as the subject she would paint if she had the skills to paint anything she wanted, describing "some place with water, trees and a sunset". A scene easily associated with serenity and peace. In hindsight, I would liked to have asked Alicia about this place, where it might be, and what it meant to her. During the interview, instead of asking her to elaborate on this dream I mistakenly ended her thought of the place by excitedly telling her I wanted to be the first to see the painting when she was done, which at the time she seemed pleased and smiled at my reaction. However, in listening to the tapes later, it was not how I wished I had responded and in the abundance

of follow-up questions I remember trying to organize carefully in my head, this was one I regrettably, and admittedly forgot to go back to.

The meaning and significance of physical activity in Alicia's life. In the greater picture of Alicia's life, sport and physical activity represent a very small portion of time in relation to time spent on her studies, drawing, reading, visiting with family and contributing to school clubs and groups. As the eldest daughter in her Cantonese family, Alicia's parents expect her to excel in her studies and act as a role model for her younger sister. While her parents support Alicia's participation in the twice weekly specialized activity program, Alicia has not been permitted to join other sport specific programs. For example, because she is an excellent Boccia player, Alicia was asked by an adapted sport coach to join the provincial club but was not permitted to do so by her parents. Alicia's parents regulate her extra-curricular activity involvement, though they indeed recognize the health benefits in Alicia engaging in physical activity at the program as she gets little opportunity for active exercise at school through her High School gym class.

What Alicia's parents may not realize is that by limiting her extra-curricular sporting activities, they may be limiting the potential for Alicia to have socialization experiences given that she is mostly "isolated" at school and has little other opportunity to experience other social environments with her peers. The mix of High School physical education as a place where Alicia summarized her activity as being alone and "on the sidelines", combined with a strained relationship with her gym teacher, only amplified Alicia's feelings of isolation. However, Alicia was happy to participate with her classmates and aide in Junior High physical education because she felt involved and engaged. She also expressed a great deal of enjoyment when she described "active"

places where others were present, as well as an appreciation for spending time with other youths with disabilities. In particular, Alicia mentioned an activity camp she attended for youths with disabilities, and the specialized youth program at the centre. Opportunities for reciprocal and genuine social interaction, accessible facilities, and enjoyment of the feeling that the people of those places understood Alicia were major reasons that Alicia developed a positive attachment to those places.

Alicia also spoke very positively of her experiences of, and enjoyment for, swimming. As an activity that made her feel "free", it was also solitary and without social interaction. These elements suggest that swimming for Alicia might be an activity of retreat, where the swimming pool may act as a place for retreat – a sort of self-chosen isolation. Alicia's enjoyment of this freeing and retreat-like experience supports the work of Lieberg (1997) and others who have postulated that adolescents may also need places for retreat in addition to socialization opportunities. Swimming is a very positive experience that Alicia likes to do on her own, and it is an activity that enables her to leave the physically noticeable indicators of her disability on the pool deck.

Amanda

Fifteen year old Amanda is just like many other youths her age. She likes going to movies at the theatre, talking on the phone, and writing emails and MSN messages to her friends whenever she can to chat with them. Along with her friends, she goes to school at a Junior High in her community and takes classes like Math, Social Studies, Physical Education and Art. However, Amanda suggested that she would much rather be sleeping in or taking a nap than attend classes any day! When Monday morning rolls around, the first thing she wishes for is for it to be Friday already so her weekend can start and she

can hang out with her friends at a "Teen Group" she belongs to. As well, Amanda wants to travel to far and exciting places, to graduate Junior High with good grades, and she dreams of being a competitive athlete someday.

Unlike some of her friends, however, Amanda spends a lot of her time wishing for a different life for herself; a life where people could recognize her strengths as readily as her weaknesses; a life where she could feel what it was like to run with her classmates on a football field and score a touchdown for her team; a life where she could go on a school trip to the city museum and not need special accommodations just to use the washroom; a life that included far fewer people who mentally torture her on a daily basis. She wishes for a life that did not include a wheelchair as an extension of her physique.

Amanda is quite comfortable with her disability and has never been one to blush at the words 'able-bodied' when describing people unlike herself. She openly communicates the realities of her life, and over time has developed a clear "us and them" attitude on which she bases many of the opinions she conveys when speaking about people with and without disabilities. It is important to note that Amanda does not feel sorry for herself in the wishing that she does. Rather, she feels anger, frustration, and perhaps a bit of envy toward "people who have it easy and can use their legs". For example, when Amanda told me about the basketball picture she drew as an activity she didn't like (see Appendix K), the main message of her story revolved around the differences between standing kids and kids who use wheelchairs. She began by telling me that the nets are too high for kids who use wheelchairs and according to Amanda, all basketball courts should have nets that can be raised and lowered to make it easier for the

kids who use wheelchairs to play too. Then I noticed that her drawing didn't show any kids using wheelchairs, so I asked her about it:

Jillian: "I noticed that these guys don't have wheelchairs like the other ones do, like the ones over here that you drew…" *(Jillian refers to the basketball picture and points to the other Wheelchair Rugby drawing that Amanda brought in)*

Amanda: "Like I'm comparing the kids that are in here that can jump and stuff, and do lay-ups and all that stuff"

Jillian: "Oh, ok, so there's people in here that can do all that stuff?"

Amanda: "Ya"

Jillian: "Ok…"

Amanda: "And that I --- that kids that are in wheelchairs can't"

Jillian: "Ok"

Amanda: "I would have drawn the chairs, the kids in the chairs, but…

Jillian: "But the point to you was that the kids out of chairs can…"

Amanda: "Ya, that the kids out of chairs can do it and the other kids couldn't

Jillian: "Right, ok. So what do you think these people are thinking right now?" *(Jillian points to the kids standing in the picture)*

Amanda: "Um that it would kind of be hard, like they were thinking of, like, how, what, how if they were in chairs it would be hard and how it wouldn't be hard if they weren't in chairs. Like, to, like for, like to do jumps and the lay-ups, and, like running and jumping to the net and shooting the ball. They would think that that would be hard for kids in wheelchairs. And that they wish that the kids that were in wheelchairs weren't in wheelchairs, so they could have more fun."

Amanda accepts her disability as a fact of her life. Her father once told me that when she was little, their family lived in a three storey house with Amanda's room located on the top floor. They did not make special accommodations for her but instead taught her to stick it out. He said that even if she was crying about how hard it was, they did not come to her rescue; they let her muddle through things for herself. Instead of

using her wheelchair in the house (because there were so many stairs), she literally used to "bum around the house" using her arms to repeatedly lift her lower torso high enough to swing it forward a few inches above the floor. I remember feeling that it sounded a lot like "tough love" but I was sure it contributed to Amanda's identity as an *able person* with spina bifida. Whenever she can, Amanda uses her assets and abilities, including using her voice to advocate for herself and others with disabilities.

Although Amanda's abilities were celebrated and expected in the early years of her school physical education experiences with her school, her only other experience with an "integrated" gym class in Junior High made her feel more left out than part of something. The place of Junior High gym for Amanda was negative overall because the other students didn't know how to help her, her teacher didn't ask her how she could be included or how she could participate, and sometimes the class took place at a track, facility or field that was not physically accessible for Amanda's wheelchair. I have created two compiled stories below that are intended to highlight the contrasting feelings Amanda expressed toward school physical education during her Elementary and Junior High/High School years…

In elementary, I did a lot of things in gym, actually, most of the stuff that they did indoors. I participated in the volleyball, the floor hockey, the basketball – and I liked it 'cause when I was on the team, the gym teacher always let me throw it in to the kids, and then pick the other team, and then chuck it to somebody on the far end of the court. It was fun! Even the outdoors stuff for gym was good then. Like, when we were doing rugby with the big rugby balls, my teacher aide would push me in the grass and I would have fun. It was like flag football so the kids would have to grab the flag off my chair. Once, she left me in the middle of the field, and I was like: "what are you doing?!" But then I realized that she did that so she could do a touchdown for me and I was like: "Ok, that's why she left me in the middle of the field!" Then I was happy.

Now, I participate in some stuff they do. Like, I tried handball, and badminton… and well… oh yeah! I do the swimming unit! But I really wish that in gym the activities could be adapted better . 'Cause sometimes they don't, um, adapt it well enough. Like, most times, I just watch. And sometimes the kids hit me accidentally with the ball, ya, that's happened a couple of times. I mean, well, I sit next to the court and lift some two-pound weights that my teacher has for me there whenever I can't join in. So I mostly do my weights and then just watch what the kids are doing, and then I get involved in the gym discussions. Like if there are tests. I just watch the kids to know so that if there's a test, then I know. I have to listen to the teacher and listen to what their discussion is and hopefully get a good mark on my test.

Despite a number of environmental and emotional barriers, Amanda did enjoy the few times she was able to participate with her class, including during the swimming unit. She told me: "…when the swimming unit comes, I'm raring to go, excited, ready".

Swimming as an activity and the pool as a place were thoughts that Amanda took considerable care in telling me about. The pool was a place she could go to and swim by herself or with her family, friends, and classmates. Amanda is not on a swim team and her swimming mechanics do not resemble textbook pictures, but she enjoys swimming and being in the water means something good to her. The paragraph below is a compiled story that I have crafted from several of Amanda's interviews with me. Much of the paragraph content includes direct phrases Amanda shared with me during our interview. However, as Amanda's sentences were sometimes fragmented and stories about swimming occurred in several interviews, I compressed her thoughts concisely in order to help detail the significance of swimming to her and why the swimming pool is her favorite place to be active.

The swimming pool is my favorite place to be active! If I didn't have to go to school so much and if I didn't have so much homework, I would go swimming at the

pool all the time. I want to be in the Paralympics for swimming one day… It's a place I can get in to, you know? Like, the change rooms are big enough for my chair to get in and around, I can move in and out of the bathroom stalls – the doors swing the right way… I mean, it really helps being able to get in there in the first place! Sometimes the water is 'brrrr'! If I haven't been in too long yet, it's kind of cold at first – and then you get used to it. And once you're in, it's like, awesome. I can get so much energy in there… I really like being in the water. I like sticking my head under the water. I'm like a fish – everybody says that I am a fish, and I am! My class even thinks I am when we go there for that unit in gym. I love swimming! And then sometimes I like the water just for the way it feels. Sometimes it makes me feel like I'm absolutely nothing – I'm like…blah. Like I'm melting into the water and I am the water, kind of thing. On those days, I can take all of the noises and everything out of my head and just focus on what I'm doing. I feel comfortable in the water. It's a good thing.

Amanda described her experiences at the pool as being a calming place to her, as a place where she can relax and just be herself. This may be an indication that the swimming pool acts as a place of retreat for Amanda at times (Lieberg,1997).

Although swimming is one of the only activities Amanda can participate in during her Junior High physical education class, her minimal participation in that setting has not stopped Amanda from being active outside of physical education class. She participates in several extra-curricular activity programs, three of which are designed specifically for youths with disabilities (wheelchair track, wheelchair rugby, and an adapted weight training and sport skills program), and one that is an integrated program for both youths with and without disabilities (a bowling team). Without question, Amanda identifies with other youths with disabilities. She advocates for both the needs and abilities of others with a disability as well as herself. When she compares the way people with disabilities do things to the way her able-bodied peers do things, she intends to emphasize that

youths with disabilities can still do things, they just do them *differently*. She proudly labeled her Rugby drawing (see Appendix L) "Sports for the Disabled" and told me about how she likes playing rugby with her friends from the specialized programs "the way it is supposed to be played". To Amanda, this means playing in a wheelchair and using a volleyball in place of a rugby ball. She acknowledged knowing that "able-bodied rugby" exists, but that wheelchair rugby was definitely her preference. Also illustrating Amanda's identity with disability culture is her interest in educating "others" (people without disabilities) about what it is like to be in a wheelchair. She really enjoyed it when kids at her school were given a chance to try to maneuver around in a wheelchair. It was a story that came up after she said that it makes her feel badly when able-bodied kids say they wish they could "sit down" because they are tired:

Amanda: "That makes me feel bad. That they stand and I can't. But you know, that's just life. They should put… like, I don't usually say this, but they would put themselves in my position just to see how… well, actually, there's a program at my school and some kids *did* get to do that. And when they got back, I asked them: 'so how does it feel, being in a wheelchair?!?' and they were like 'oh, it was hard!' and then one kid was like 'oh it was easy' and I'm like, 'ok, nope. Obviously you don't know how hard it is!' and he was like: 'oh, ok'.

Amanda's disability identity is further emphasized by the kinds of dreams she has – she uses the words "Paralympic athlete" and "wheelchair track" to describe her biggest wishes. She did not mention wanting to be in the Olympics (even though wheelchair track is now a recognized event specifically for people with disabilities within the Olympics) or envision herself as a member of any able-bodied teams. According to research by Hutzler et al. (2002), Amanda's disability identity is in contrast to many other children with disabilities who consistently try to identify with their able-bodied peers, sometimes even

being ashamed to be seen with other children with disabilities. Amanda told me that she prefers the friends that she knows through her participation in specialized programs over her able-bodied friends at school because "they know what it's like to have to go to the hospital", and "they know what it's like to sprain your finger in your wheelchair spokes". Later, I asked her:

Jillian: "Who do you think is your favorite person, or who are your favorite people in life?"

Amanda: "Like, my friends and stuff?"

Jillian: "Anyone, ya!"

Amanda: "Like my friends. I have some able bodied and a couple of disabled. Like when you're with the disabled ones – like my friends in wheelchairs, like, they're fun to be around, you joke about really fun stuff, like goofy stuff"

Jillian: "Ya, so you really like being around your friends?"

Amanda: "Ya, sometimes you have to get away from the other ones that you have at school and just hang out with the other ones who understand what you're going through kind of thing. Like, how different it is to get around in a school, like, if there's like, how the facilities are and all that kind of stuff. When you kind of compare it, like I can't talk about things with my other friends and my other ones, like the other ones…"

Jillian: "In wheelchairs?"

Amanda: "Ya, some stuff I can talk about and other stuff I can't. They just don't get it."

Interestingly, Amanda talked about the friends she has at the specialized programs, and the friends she has at school, but she did not talk about having friends outside of these places. Amanda did not tell any stories about informal meetings with friends outside of school hours, or going on social outings that were not already part of a specialized activity program. She said that "trucking her wheelchair around" often adds some difficulty in getting to places, and I would agree that this may be part of the issue.

However, I became curious about Amanda's friendships after talking with her about her favorite people to play sports with. Amanda told me that her friends were her favorite people to play sports with, and so knowing that Amanda had told me earlier that she has both able-bodied friends and friends with disabilities, I wanted to clarify which friends she meant:

Jillian: "Ok, so you like playing sports with your friends. So, when you say your friends, which friends do you usually play sports with?"

Amanda: "Well, I usually don't see most of my friends, 'cause they're usually doing some other, like, stuff."

Jillian: "Other stuff? Like what kinds of stuff?"

Amanda: "Like with *their* friends kind of thing – so I usually don't get to see them – as much. I talk to them on the phone and stuff, but I don't get to see them as much…as I want to. I see them at school but that's about it."

Not telling stories about friendships outside of school or specialized activity programs may not necessarily mean that Amanda does not have close friends, but those friendships (if they exist) were not salient enough for her to bring them up. However, Amanda did mention other friendships that she had at school with "the lunch-room lady", her school teacher because she helped her to take the attendance every day, and the recess monitor. Perhaps at school, "friends" are people who accept Amanda and socialize with her. Further, her pattern of noting older adults as friends is consistent with Skar's (2003) research that highlighted the tendency for adolescents with disabilities to make friends with people older than their peer bracket and to have fewer friends overall.

While telling me about her school recess period, Amanda told me that she liked to go outside because being outside gave her lots of energy and color in her cheeks. She told me about how the "silly snow" made it hard for her to get around in the winter but that

something about the air made her feel good. She didn't speak much about outdoor environments throughout her interviews overall (aside from her positive experience with playing flag football in her school physical education class, mentioned previously) but in the one other instance of mentioning an outdoor place, she described her experiences with recess in detail and what *that* outdoor place was like for her.

> "I couldn't do what the other kids were doing. Like running around er, on the um, equipment.... (So) when those kids were playing, sometimes (other) kids would come and walk – 'cause we have a path going around the whole area – so the kids would come to walk with me, or I would hang out with the supervisor, and sometimes I would ask if I could ring – 'cause she would bring a bell out from the office – and I would ask if I could ring it. And then I rang it. I felt like I was actually doing something. Being part of the whole recess thing.... Sometimes I would hang out with kids that I didn't even know – and just talk with them I guess. They were in my own grade but I didn't know them."

Amanda's experiences with recess were similar to her experiences in Junior High and High School physical education classes where she often felt more left out than part of something. The small amount of social interaction she was able to participate in with quality, age-appropriate friends (Skar, 2003) likely contributed to Amanda's lackluster experience with school recess. The negative school experiences Amanda described were in stark contrast to the experiences she enjoyed when participating in specialized activity programs which were often characterized by far more inviting social climates.

The meaning and significance of physical activity in Amanda's life. Amanda's participation in sport and physical activity plays an important role in her life. She has a lot of built-up anger about her peers and others in her everyday life who treat her unnecessarily differently and she uses her participation in sport to emphasize her abilities.

Throughout her stories and drawings, Amanda gave me the feeling that she had something to prove. That she wanted people to know her story and that she wanted me to understand what things were like for her. Near the end of our last interview, I asked Amanda to try to sum her experiences up for me in her own words. Her response is uniquely illustrative of her negative feelings and frustration with the perceptions she believes others sometimes have of her:

Jillian: "Um, this is my last question. See if you can think about this: if you wanted to tell people what playing sports and being active is like for you, what would you tell them?"

Amanda: "That it's really, that it's harder than it looks. It's hard because instead of using my legs I have to use my arms and my arms get really really tired. And at the end of the day, I'm exhausted and tired. Man, it's just very bad. So sometimes the kids think, they're always saying: 'Oh, I wish I could sit down and not have to do this – do that'. I'm like: 'Nah-nah no! Nope! That's not how it works! There's a reason why I'm in the chair so get over it. There's a reason why, so just forget about it'. And the teacher has told the kids why and I've told the kids why and they still complain every day. It's like: 'Oyie-yoie-yoie-yoie-yoie! Live with it! You use your legs! I don't!' And sometimes they wanna push me and they want to touch my chair – that kind of thing, and I always say: 'No you can't, don't touch my chair or anything'. And the teachers have to say: 'It's a part of her, don't touch that, don't do anything that will break her chair or whatever'. And they listen. Sometimes. So ya."

Amanda is involved in numerous specialized activity programs and has attended many camps for youths with disabilities – summer camps, day camps and overnight camping trips. In the time since the conclusion of our interviews, she also joined a wheelchair track club and started swimming with a group of youths in a local integrated swim program. Her parents are extremely busy professionals who devote their care and

time to Amanda's older, able-bodied sister. Despite busy schedules, they are very supportive of Amanda's activity interests and happily drive her to practices and training sessions and help to make any accommodations for Amanda to participate in activities at school as well. Their stance is that sports and activity give Amanda a chance to experience some independence, an accepting social environment, and they reinforce a "use it or lose it" motto regarding Amanda's abilities. Amanda on the other hand, enjoys the feeling of being part of something. She enjoys the social atmosphere that places of physical activity can provide for her when they are adapted to her needs, abilities, and interests. She also likes the respect she perceives from others, such as her classmates, when they recognize her participation in extra-curricular sports and activities. She told me stories of how surprised her classmates were when she won arm wrestling matches, and also how surprised they were when she did well in a Terry Fox Run her school participated in. Without doubt, Amanda's stories and beliefs highlight the potential for sport and activity to challenge stereotypical views of people with disabilities (Kozub & Porretta, 1996; Lindstrom, 1992).

Amanda also holds close attachment to athletes with disabilities who are successful, likely for similar reasons; these people have challenged society's viewpoints. For example, when asked if there is anyone she considers a hero, she shared that Rick Hansen (a marathon wheelchair racer) was at the top of her list because he is inspiring to her and he is a motivational figure for many kids with disabilities. Also, at another point in her interviews she excitedly talked about another famous wheelchair racer who she got to see in person when he was racing in Edmonton. His speed and musculature impressed her more than anything she had ever witnessed. She relates well to role models who have

disabilities. The empowering impression she has of athletes with disabilities along with her own experiences of both specialized and integrated places affording adapted physical activity have positively contributed to what sport, physical fitness, and athleticism has meant to her.

James

James is a sixteen year old High School student who is exceptionally interested in anything related to computers. He enjoys playing computer games, likes to chat online, and also wants to own his own computer distribution company someday. Growing up in central Alberta, he attended a number of different Elementary and Junior High schools while his parents moved from place to place for employment. Staying in one place was never an option for long, and as one might imagine, the numerous family moves have made it difficult for James to make and keep friends. James also has hemiplegic cerebral palsy and although he ambulates extremely well, his gait pattern is unbalanced by the spasticity on the left side of his body. He has been treated negatively and called hurtful names at several of the schools he has attended because of his differences.

Feeling uprooted educationally and socially has led James to crave consistency in his life. He wants to have stable figures in his life, but he often harshly believes that the people he meets, though they may seem friendly enough, are only temporary fixtures. To him, it won't be long before he has to leave them or they decide he is not friend-worthy and turn on him. His childhood experiences at school and at home have left him frustrated and aggressive. He does not take well to strangers and especially not if they have a joking manner. His past experiences have taught him that where there is joking, it might sometime be directed hurtfully at him. Thus, James keeps a careful, defensive

guard up until he really gets to know new people. However, his guard is not always a silent one and if he feels emotionally threatened, he lashes out at whomever he believes is the cause of his insecure feeling. I have personally seen this happen when new volunteers began to work with James at the centre. His retaliations to their good intentioned jokes sometimes seem far more extreme and sharp than would typically be expected. This behavior is not uncommon in children who have been inherently classified as "low skilled" (a distinction that would describe James) and who have been publicly criticized by their peers (Portman, 1995).

Chawla (1992) has noted that in order for youths to develop a sense of place attachment, they must experience a sense of security with the places of their lives. School in general was a place where James did not feel emotionally secure, and his experiences in physical education classes specifically varied in terms of whether he perceived the place positively or negatively. More specifically, physical education as a place for James was both positive and negative depending on the class years he referred to. Considering his three interviews, it seems that physical education has played a significant role in James' perception of his overall experiences in physical activity and sports. He often started any physical activity-related stories with his physical education experiences as a landmark to help direct where the rest of his thoughts were intended. The paragraphs below are a compiled story that I have created in order to help describe what physical education as a place was like for James…

I did everything in elementary gym, you know, like playing Doctor Dodgeball and doing all of the drill-type things after they taught me how to walk again after my surgery. My teacher back then even let me be the score keeper and do the time clock for games that needed that. It was good and I did lots of stuff. The parts that I hated – well hate is

such a strong word… really didn't like, were when I was in Junior High. The teacher there was mean, and I always felt like he was breathing down my neck, you know? Like, for one thing, when we were starting class, everyone had to run laps before we started whatever it was we were doing that day. Well, I would run too, even though I can't run that well, but even if I was really tired and really out of breath I wasn't allowed to stop. If you stopped you had to start all over. I hated being singled out like that and even when the class was doing other things, there I was. Running laps.

And you know what else? When we were doing a wrestling lesson, like, there were other kids there, like, the able-bodied kind, and even once they already got me down and I would be standing back up again they would just push me back down again. I was already down and they didn't have to do that. At least then, the teacher said that if anyone tried to do that to any of the special kids he would send them to the office. That was the last time that happened…

Anyways, there just weren't enough options for me to play in for Junior High. Like, the teacher didn't know what to do. He could have um, before the gym class started, he could have come to me and asked me what he needed to do to make it kind of safer for me. And let everyone know about my disability. That might have made it better. 'Cause like, at High School in gym, everybody knows about my disability and like, they're the same people I have in my homeroom class so they know. They know what I can and can not do and I know the same things for them and it's good that way. I do everything now except skating and that's only because of my balance. And we go lots of places for gym like to track places and curling rinks and stuff. I'm allowed to sit out if I want to now, but I don't give up in those places because there are a lot of people exactly the same as me.

Positive experiences with physical education were those places where James felt he could participate fully and where appropriate accommodations by the teacher and class were made for him to do so. In James' positive experiences with gym, the social climate was a helpful and understanding one in which he felt emotionally and physically secure. However, James' negative experiences with gym class, (mainly in Junior High) were those in which he felt alienated and bullied both from the teachers and the students. This

place environment was not conducive to him feeling emotionally secure and therefore did not foster a positive sense of attachment:

Jillian: "If you wanted to tell people what playing sports and being physically active was like for you in Junior High, what would you tell them?"
James: "It was really tough and I never wanted to do again."

James' feelings of insecurity have influenced his ability to make and keep friends. Of note, adolescents with similar disabilities to James in Skar's (2003) research also reported social barriers in the form of negative attitudes toward their disabilities. Additionally, an interesting point is that the coping mechanism reported by the youths in Skar's (2003) study was the taking on of new roles, such as class joker in order to be accepted by peers. This identity is one that James is familiar with. He has been known to make jokes for others and also makes fun of himself to amuse others in his High School classes.

In the extra-curricular activity program he participates in at the Centre where I interviewed him, James often assumed the role of Jester. Chawla (1992) has noted that youths of all ages need places where they can experiment with different identities. It appears that James has opted to dually use the specialized activity program as a place where he can practice and hone his identity as the jester in order to showcase that identity in other places such as school, for example.

At the time of our interview, James was involved in several specialized activity programs including a few that were coordinated by provincial sport organizations, as well as the one in which I participated with him. Generally speaking, James spoke very highly of his specialized activity experiences. In the below example of specialized activity programs as a topical *place*, James hints that elements of the *place* may influence how he

feels about certain activities. In our first interview, we reached a point when I asked him what sorts of things he doesn't like about sports, and the following is an excerpt from that transcript:

James: Well, one of the sports I don't like is track and field.
Jillian: Ok, don't like track and field. How come you don't like track and field?
James: I think it's like, waaaaaaay too much running.
Jillian: Way too much running?
James: Like for, for like, my legs to handle. Like maybe once I get my surgery done and over with I can handle it a little more.

In the above conversation, James was referring to track and field that he had done with his class in school. In the time between the above interview with James and our next scheduled interview, we coincidentally had an adapted track and field session booked for our activity program and we had invited a specialized coach to come in and work with the youths at the track near our centre. James, who was often tentative with new activities, came to the session that night and surprised everyone. In the two years I had been volunteering with him, I had never seen him respond as energetically and attentively as he did during that track session. The following is another transcript excerpt from the next scheduled interview we had together where James was telling me that he really liked sports because they give you a good workout:

Jillian: Ya? So what kids of sports do you like that give you a really good workout?
James: I guess the track and field? The running thing?
Jillian: Totally, ya!
James: Which I kind of amazed <u>myself</u> when I ran like that.
Jillian: Ya?
James: I just, I just, while I was running, I just looked back and I was like: "Hooh-ly!" I never knew I could run that fast.

Jillian: Ya? Have you ever tried to run that fast before?
James: No.
Jillian: It was fun hey? You were really fast! How did you feel after that session?
James: Proud of myself!

One obvious difference in James' change of heart about participating in track and field is that in school physical education, James did not have access to the same specialized feedback that he received from the specialized coach at the centre. The specialized coach was very attentive to James' strengths and style of running and was able to offer very clear and specific feedback to James to help him improve his sprint times in terms of both the starting blocks and his running technique. As James suggested that his physical education teachers in Junior High and High School were not at all as helpful in adapting activities as he felt they could have been, it may be assumed that his teachers were unable to provide helpful feedback for specific skills such as track and field, for any number of reasons. However, an additional explanation might involve James' feelings that the specialized track experience was one where he felt physically and emotionally safe to try his hardest (Chawla, 1992). One of the specialized coach's helpers had the same mobility impairment as James and James may have felt inspired by her efforts as well as her apparent disregard for onlookers who watched her adapted running technique. As well, our group (the people of the place) recognized James' full efforts to be a risk James did not usually take and we were very supportive of him. Support and cheering seemed to be opposite reactions to what James customarily received during his experiences in Junior High and High School gym classes.

For James, physical accessibility as a mediating factor for his experiences was not a salient issue. The only mobility aide he uses is an ankle and foot orthotic and when he

participates in activities he sometimes needs adapted equipment like Velcro straps to assist with his grip. In his case the people of the place make the biggest difference in James' experiences of places, and especially in places which afford physical activity. For instance, when James was describing his experience in the specialized activity program offered at the Centre, he told me that the volunteers there were helpful and he could make easy conversation with them. He said that it made him feel comfortable to be around other kids just like him "'cause they probably knew what it was like to feel made fun of at some time or another". He even went so far as to say that one of the instructors who had been with the program several years (and who was there when James started with the program) was so supportive and inspiring that he gave James reason to live:

James: "…(Charlie) um, made me feel like that I have – that I have something to live for. Like before I was into this, I felt like I had nothing – nothing to live for. Like, sometimes, sometimes I would just break down. I said: 'why am I living'? (Charlie) just made everything brighter."

According to Chawla (1992), social affiliation helps to foster place attachments. In James' case, social relationships are minimal. Throughout his interviews, he told few stories of "friends" at school or at home. Instead of being a part of informal social activities, James often retreats to solitary activities like working and playing on his computer or using his microscope set. His computer-related interest is consistent with other adolescents with disabilities who have reported using computers and the internet as a way to participate with security, without revealing their disabilities (Skar, 2003). Overall, James' experience as a poorly integrated youth in his mainstreamed education and activity experiences has sadly been reported as a common occurrence for adolescents with cerebral palsy (van der Dussen et al., 2001).

As James has few social experiences with his peers, he has had challenging times in a variety of venues throughout his young life. He told me once that "it's hard not having people to talk to" which made me wonder what that might be like. My reflections later were that despite a number of negative experiences at school, moving consistently every few years during his childhood, feeling that his parents do not understand him, and not knowing what quality friends and social relationships were like, he still has a clear vision of what he would like to do in life. He knows his abilities and limitations, and his understandably aggressive tendencies aside, James has found ways of coping with all of the obstacles he has faced thus far. It is my impression that this is why James greatly respects others who he may not even know personally, but whom are people that he feels know what it's like to persevere:

Jillian: "Is there anyone that you kind of look up to, someone who is kind of a hero, someone you'd like to be like?

James: "I guess the Emergency team. Like, all the doctors, the policemen, the firemen. 'Cause they save people's lives every day and they never get a rest….Like um, even though they could go like a year without sleep they can still do everything like a year later….Like for instance, like when those fires were blazing and everything was freezing up, they would still go out there in the freezing cold and turn every water pump they had on."

Jillian: "Mmmm. Is there anything about those specific kinds of people that really grab ya?"

James: "Like, take the Police in BC who finally found the guy behind all of those killings? The prostitute killings? Like, I was amazed that they actually found him."

Jillian: "Ya? So what amazed you the most about them being able to find him?"

James: "They never quit. Like some people after a while they would just quit. And they never quit….Like those guys made me believe that nothing's worth quitting for."

The same stories of perseverance tie into James' dream of being a football quarterback (see accompanying drawing, Appendix N). The football field was an outdoor place that James ascribed meaning to by attending professional games with a friend who had season tickets and by playing casual football with some classmates during their lunch break at school and on weekends. The paragraph I have organized below helps to bring all of James' thoughts together in order to give the reader an appreciation for what his dream entailed…

My dream would be to play football with a professional sports team. Those guys are kind of stars and everything, with people asking for their autograph and taking their pictures… It would be so exhilarating working out with my team and being out in the fresh air and all that stuff! I like being outside. And I would want to be the quarterback, 'cause then if there's a call that I think that's wrong, I would get to talk to the ref to see if he will change his mind – kind of like a captain in hockey. Being the quarterback, the whole team would depend on me. I would always be thinking about the next way to get a touchdown on the field. They have fireworks when touchdowns happen and the whole crowd in the stadium goes wild! In my dream, that would be me. I don't think I would be able to sleep after the game was done!

Perseverance on the football field might involve feeling that the team depended on James and he therefore could never give up even if his team were losing a game. Or perhaps, perseverance for James might be viewed as working hard to help his team out of an unsuccessful winning streak, or working hard in recovery after sustaining an injury on the field. Interestingly, James also respected the work of military personnel and spoke about how he finds their work inspiring too, likely also due to the daily adversities that military personnel often face when called to duty overseas and are required to work away from their families. These personnel persevere in light of difficult times.

Furthermore, relating specifically to individuals who have persevered in the face of physical challenges like his own, he told me about the respect he had for his gym teacher in elementary school who once played for a professional sports team but seriously injured his knee. The teacher had endured years of recovery but was still working at it while he was teaching James' class. James told me he thought his teacher understood him because he understood what it was like to have a limp in his walk every day. James also likened his experience of persevering through taunts and being made fun of to the experiences of the lead singer of the Rolling Stones who he feels was probably knows what being treated differently is like:

James: "Like, he started where I'm at right now. Like, he's kind of been down the same road as I've been? And he's made a very successful life. Everybody knows him now.

Jillian: "Ok, how do you relate your life to his in the sense that he's been down the same road? Like, what parallels do you see in his life compared to your life?"

James: "I guess like, when he was a kid and going into my age, he's been teased a lot about his big lips and everything. And now people from his school look back at him now and they all say like: "I should have been more nice to him, 'cause look where I am and look where *he* is!'"

There is a hint of wanting recognition in this conversation, of wanting to feel important. James conveyed this idea several times throughout his stories about his football dream with the stadium cheering for him and acknowledging his success. His desire for recognition was also evident in his dreams of becoming the next Bill Gates or Donald Trump. These are two very well known and powerful people which are characteristics that James does not currently have.

The meaning and significance of physical activity in James' life. James once told me in a candid conversation before I formally interviewed him that he liked coming to the program at the centre for social reasons. At that time, I had not completed in-depth readings on the importance for youths (with or without disabilities) to have places where they feel like they can relate socially, feel appreciated for their participation, and congregate and build their own self-identities (e.g. Chawla, 1992). I also had not reflected on the fact that the program may indeed have offered and fulfilled some of these needs. Instead, my initial reaction was to joke with James and tell him that he couldn't have been working hard enough then, and internally, I felt disappointed. I felt sad that James didn't see the program as a great place because there was all kinds of adapted equipment that he could use and that the program was a place where he could work out and play hard for the personal satisfaction I thought it would afford. I remember leaving the program that night feeling that my enthusiastic efforts to instill the importance of physical activity and being active were not reaching the kids. My own personal lenses colored what I heard that night and instead of hearing exactly what James was saying and celebrating that our program could help provide a place for him to grow socially, I heard that his response didn't echo what I thought I wanted to hear. At the time, I also didn't know the personal details of James' school and home life or how that statement should have made me feel proud and victorious that participating in the program was beneficial to him. Admittedly, it has since taken me months to realize the significance of what he shared with me.

Opportunities for genuine social interaction and enjoyment of the company of people he trusts, are without question the prime reasons why James has enjoyed being

physically active in the places he described. These included selected years of his physical education class, specialized physical activity programs, and his dream of being a key player of a football team. James did not tell me about times in his everyday life when he would just pick up a basketball or a football and play like some of his able-bodied peers might have done. This may be partly because James has slipped into the social "Catch 22" of making and keeping peer relationships (Weiss et al., 2003).

James' time outside of school hours has increasingly been devoted to interactions through online chat rooms, learning about computers, and refining his web design skills. Whether he would spend more time in physically active environments if he experienced positive places more often is unclear, but based on his goals and dreams of owning his own computer company and wanting to be the next Bill Gates, my initial thoughts are that it is unlikely. He has directed his attention to realistic, functional skills that can further his professional life. His future plans do not generally include physically active aspirations, even though another ultimate dream would be to play for a professional football team. He has made no attempt to follow-up or pursue his football dream, and does not feel sad that his abilities do not approximate those of potential NFL quarterback candidates. Instead, he looks fondly on his dream, realizing that is precisely what it is.

In the case of swimming, James' negative experiences have caused him to abandon participation and interest in the activity altogether. To elaborate, swimming was an activity that our specialized program scheduled twice per semester. James never attended it (in any of the years I volunteered there) and I never knew why. So, one night that we were scheduled to be swimming and he came to the program but would not put his swim trunks on and get into the pool with everyone else, I did what any concerned

instructor might do. I waited until the other kids were off getting ready and I asked him. He was a participant in my study at the time, but as we were not scheduled for an interview at that very moment, I was not physically recording what he said. I am able to offer my interpretation of his story based on some sheets of field notes I wrote after the program ended that night. His story paralyzed me while I listened. I was very carefully trying to keep my own emotions at bay as he spoke with two single tears running down his cheeks. Not wanting to go swimming quickly made perfect sense to me…

I just don't want to. And my mom said I don't have to. You're lucky I even came. She's the one who made me bring my swim shorts. I knew I wasn't going to get in…(looking at the floor)… you'd feel the same way you know, if you were me. You didn't have to go through what I went through... My whole class was there. Everyone was just playing in the water. You know, playing pool ball in the shallow end, diving and jumping flips in the deep end. They had music playing and everything – it was free time at the end of our lessons. I was sort of bobbing around with a big, airy ball when all of a sudden I was choking and swallowing water. Some jerk in my class thought it would be funny to see how long I could hold my breath. But he never let go. And nobody saw me because I was under the water and he was on top… I thought I was dying. I couldn't breathe… Not even the lifeguard saw what was happening. It wasn't until my teacher was walking around on the pool deck that she looked down and saw him holding me under water. I guess she was yelling at him to stop. I didn't hear any of that. I don't remember much else, but I know my teacher dove in with her clothes on to get me out of the pool.

Although his future participation in swimming seems extremely unlikely, James' negative experiences highlight the importance for James to be a part of physically and emotionally safe places in order to encourage an active lifestyle. Leading an active lifestyle is important not only for physical health but also for social stimulation as has been the case with some specialized activity programs James has belonged to, for

example. Physical activity participation in places rich with positive energy and a welcoming social climate have been the places most valued by James. They are the places James would be most likely to frequent when considering his future participation.

Kelsey

At the age of three, Kelsey's parents started wondering if Kelsey's balance and coordination were delayed in comparison to Kelsey's older brother when he was her age. They took Kelsey to a number of doctors and specialists who gave them no reason for alarm. These professionals basically labeled Kelsey as a "late bloomer" even though as the weeks passed, she still wasn't able to walk on her own. It wasn't until Kelsey was five years old and ready to enter Elementary school that her family decided to take her to a specialist in the United States for some innovative new tests. Following that visit, that they learned Kelsey had a condition known as spinal cord atrophy. Essentially, for Kelsey, this has meant that her cognitive development has been unaffected, but due to a narrowing of her spinal cord, she depends primarily on a manual wheelchair to get around. Inside her house, and for short distances however, Kelsey uses a walker.

Just as her family had an important presence in Kelsey's early years, they have continued to be important to Kelsey throughout her life. At sixteen years, Kelsey is an agreeable teenager who values the ties she has with both her immediate and extended families. Many of the stories Kelsey shared during her interviews involved her family in one way or another, and it has been clear to me that the fondness she spoke with is genuine.

Jillian: "Who do would you say are your favorite people or favorite person in the entire world?"

Kelsey: "My family, my whole family"

Jillian: "Ya? What makes your family your favorite people?"

Kelsey: "Well, actually, my family's quite fun to hang out with, so we interact well together, and ah, me and my dad wrestle, and my brother wrestles with me too sometimes. Me and my mom we play games – we enjoy the same things. Like, I collect Barbies, and she likes to help me dress them and collect them too. So we just know each other and do everything together.

Jillian: "How does that feel to have a family environment like that?"

Kelsey: "Great! It's really fun! Like, you look at some families like, (Jesse), her dad's not as energetic as my dad, so I always wonder like, what he is like, you know, as a father? He's probably great, but still, he's not really all that fun, and me and my dad are really fun together. Like he likes Superman, and I like Superman, and Star Wars and Batman and all those guys. That's what I was brought up with so that's what I do. Some kids were brought up on Soap Operas, I was brought up with Superman. So that makes him really fun. Ya.

Additionally, Kelsey has been to many places with her family that many children might only dream of going. These include both Disneyland and Disneyworld, Hawaii, Bermuda, Barbados, and a number of Caribbean cruises. She had many stories to tell about the beaches she had been to, amusement parks, and neat restaurants her family enjoyed. As she spoke I often found myself wondering: Beaches? Amusement parks? Wouldn't physical access to these places for someone who uses a manual wheelchair be pretty challenging? What made her experiences of these places so positive?

I found myself wondering the same questions as Kelsey told me about some neat outdoor places close to her home that are significant to her – her aunt's farm, and the ravine by her house. For example, I asked Kelsey what her favorite day of the week was, to which she replied:

"Probably Sundays. That's the day we usually go to my Aunt's Farm. It's so fun! It's a big ranch that's out in (place), and my cousins are out there and I like

> hanging out with them because they have those kittens and animals so I like to hang out with them.... They used to have sheep, but they got rid of their sheep and they got rid of their pigs, but now they just have cows, kittens, dogs, bunnies and horses.... We usually leave (our house) around eleven so we're usually there by twelve so we have lunch usually. And we usually bring my grandpa with us 'cause he always wants to come out, and we just sit around and talk, and then ah, if we stay there later, we have camp fires. And sometimes we go exploring – he takes us on his tractor and all that. The last time we went there he got a new 'bucket truck' it's called, like a big cherry picker? So it's got two buckets on it and you just stand in it and go up, 'cause that's what his job is. My dad got in it and went up six stories, my uncle went in it, and my grandpa went in it. And me and my cousins were just down on the ground talking, throwing snowballs and everything. It was really fun.... They also have a thing that has all of the tractors in it, so we go in there. Usually around Easter we go out for an Easter Egg hunt, and they're usually in the bushes so they're really hard to find! Last time I got an allergic reaction to the grass and I got a bad eye infection, but it was still fun! I'm allergic to the kittens too but I don't care. I still play with them. So, it's fun there! Ya! It's great!"

I couldn't help but think of my own experiences of visiting farms and how physically inaccessible I perceived farms to be. Again, I wondered what made her experience of this place so positive the same way I had when trying to evaluate her experience with tropical beaches. After asking Kelsey: "In the world of things, or in the nature of things, what do you think fascinates you the most?" she provided me with another interesting outdoor place narrative that helped to shed light on my concerns regarding accessibility:

> "I think nature. Like, just how it changes in seasons and all that. Like my favorite time of the year is Fall 'cause usually the leaves are all pretty and all that. I usually go out with my mom to our ravine in (place).... You get good exercise going out walking! And we take the dog with us and she's fine, 'cause she chases

> leaves all around.... (W)e usually pick leaves off the trees that are different colors, and then for Thanksgiving we wax the leaves and we put them on the table, and all that. You buy a block of wax, like, you melt it in a pot or something and then you dip the leaf in it and stick it to waxed paper or something like that. It doesn't take that long to dry – like five seconds.... We did berries a couple of years ago and they were pearly almost, pearly red. They were really cool!"

I thought that the lack of accessibility in these places would be salient to Kelsey, but instead, she did not mention physical barriers at all. She formed fond attributions to these places in her life as a result of the people she shared the experiences of the places with – her family members.

The relationship Kelsey has with her family has grown through many nights of board games and playing cards together, homework help sessions, family vacations, and having family T.V. time during which where her mom, dad, and brother all watch "Small Ville", "Crime Scene Investigation" and "Survivor" together with Kelsey. Her parents are a great source of support and Kelsey has a great deal of respect for them. However, there are times when Kelsey would like to go out without them that she finds them a little overprotective in the same way as has been noted previously by Skar (2003):

Jillian: "Um, what do you think is the best thing about being your age?"

Kelsey: "Hmmm... able to be on my own if I need to be. I think that's probably the best because well, mom and dad always have to be around now to take care of me, they don't want me to go out in the wheelchair because I could get hurt or fall down easily, so. So pretty much, being able to go on my own now. I kind of like being all alone without a parent being there with me, so that's probably the best thing."

Jillian: "The independence."

Kelsey: "Ya, like I can go to camp now without worrying about my mom and dad having to be there with me, so."

Jillian: "Ya! You're getting to that age now…"

Kelsey: "They're still there though, dad still protects me. He doesn't sometimes like me going out on my own with my friends to the mall. He's like: "be careful now", or something like that. He tries to take care of me as much as he can."

Jillian: "You're his little girl!"

Kelsey: "Ya, until he says: 'get the toys off your bed!' and I'm like: 'I'm still your little girl! I want my teddies on my bed! Ha, ha!'

In addition to her family, Kelsey also spoke about friends that she has from school whom she likes doing things with and appreciates greatly because they know her abilities. They know how to help her and she generally has fun with them. Still, Kelsey told me that she prefers the friends she met at the Centre and that her favorite place to be active was at the Centre because she really enjoys the people there. Kelsey attended the specialized activity program through which I had come to know her because she was getting far too little activity from her school physical education class. She and her family explored an out-of-school possibility to help Kelsey get the weekly activity she wanted and needed. As a result, her attendance at our program counted towards her school physical education credits. With that in mind, there were some very specific reasons as to why Kelsey named our program as a more favorable place to play games and be physically active than in her school gym class. These distinctions were prominent ones that arose time and again throughout her interviews and the following excerpts from her transcripts help to illustrate the starting point for her reasoning of preferring certain people and places over others:

> "Like, all the people (at our program) are <u>like me</u>? Like, they're all similar? So they know how to sort of play the game like <u>I</u> know how to play the game. Like, myself. Like basketball, I know how to work in my chair easily, and so will they,

> so it'll be easier to move around with them and all that.... They're at the same height as me, and I can stare right at them in the eyes and that, instead of looking up at people. So that's pretty much what it is....You know, they know what it feels like to fall down. They know what it's like to hurt your finger in your wheelchair and all that. And what it's like in the wintertime for you. They get what I'm going at.... Many times I've had to explain to people, you know, what my disability is, where I can feel and all that. Some people ask, and I don't mind telling them, but, it's just, all the people here know pretty much what to do."

The people of the place seemed to make an important contribution to Kelsey's positive experience. This is unsurprising given that a number of researchers have noted the importance of positive social experiences for youths, and particularly youths with disabilities (e.g. Brittain, 2004; Kristen et al., 2002; Skar, 2003).

Kelsey's preference for the specialized program was even more unsurprising after hearing about her participation (or lack thereof) in physical education class. Physical education class was a very unattractive place for Kelsey for several reasons. First, from the small amount of activity that she did have, Kelsey told me that she sometimes did the "bumps" in volleyball, and the bounce passes in basketball, but she never *played* the games because accommodations were not made for her to do so. She just sat and watched when the games were being played. The only sport she actually participated fully in was badminton. Kelsey gave me a list of factors that helped her decide that her school physical education class was a place she didn't care to know…

> "Swimming I don't do because the period is too short. The time is too short for me to get changed and ready, get in and all that. Ya, it's hard for me. Baseball, um, I can't run 'cause it's out on a field and it's gravel and all that. Volleyball I can't get to the ball fast enough to hit it and they won't change the rules for me, so it's hard for me. So I usually just watch that one. Track I usually watch because I

can't run around the track 'cause it's gravel. Hockey – they don't play hockey. They play ringette and well, I can go around the ice on my own with a sledge, but I just go around them in circles. Watch them. I sometimes get a little ring and shoot it around the rink myself, but I don't like playing in the game because they're all too high up for me and that and they have sticks and stuff. It's kind of scary being down low like that. It's rough and hard and all that too, and I don't like that. I might play goalie sometimes, but other than that I don't play at all."

Secondly, Kelsey did not enjoy ongoing competition in physical education class that her gym teacher often facilitated. Competition in physical education class has also been similarly disliked in specific instances by some able-bodied youths (Carlson, 1995; Portman, 1995). Competition to Kelsey meant that tensions ran high in her physical education class and the attitudes of the kids in the gym toward her left her feeling frustrated. In describing the people on her "teams" at school Kelsey said:

Kelsey: "Most of them are pretty good, well… not really. Some of them don't listen and then they don't know what to do (when I'm in the game). But I can't change how other people react to me…. Like, if I miss a ball or something they'll kind of be disappointed or something. 'Cause they know *they* could have got it or something, so I don't really bother trying."

Jillian: "I can totally understand that. What if they allowed a bounce for you so you could get to the ball in time?"

Kelsey: "Ya, well, that's the thing. If they change it for me they want to change it for everybody? And they don't want to do that. 'Cause they have done it and the people, er, I mean the kids don't wanna. I mean, they don't like that."

Jillian: "Really? What did they say?"

Kelsey: "Well, they kind of think it's unfair that I'm allowed to get one bounce and nobody else is, like if they can't get to the ball, so."

Jillian: "Oh, ok, ok. How does that make you feel? Do you ever wish you could say something to them?"

Kelsey: "Mmmm, I don't really say anything to them, I just ignore them usually. If they're complaining, it's like, they should *know*, like, 'I'm *here* (gesturing toward her wheelchair). I can't do what you can do. You should let me do it - if I think it works for me!' So."

Kelsey's classmates were not the only component of competition in her physical education class that made it unenjoyable for her. She noted time and again that competition meant that the safety of both herself and others was potentially compromised, and she found gym to be an anxiety-producing place. To Kelsey, competitive situations made her nervous in part because there were so many people together in such a small place. With bustling students in physical education moving unpredictably in a small place, she worried about the possibility for injury.

Jillian: "What is the worst part about competition to you? What *is it* about competition that just urkes you?"

Kelsey: "That it can get really rough! And somebody can actually get hurt! So really, that's what it is, mainly."

Worry about injury was a significant thought for Kelsey. She mentioned this possibility on a number of occasions. For example, Kelsey stated that her parents often worried about her getting hurt if she was out with her friends. Furthermore, Kelsey was personally worried about hurting both herself and possibly her classmates in physical education class as well. Finally, in summarizing her worries, Kelsey also told me that her number one thing not to worry about anymore would be getting hurt or injured.

Jillian: "If you could pick one thing you wouldn't have to worry about anymore, what would you pick?"

Kelsey: "Falling down. I fall down a lot in my walker, so. I'd like not to fall down as much 'cause it hurts a lot especially now that I got it fixed and I got bars put on it

and so I get my fingers caught in the bars, and it really hurts. I always worry that I'm going to break my thumb or something like that. It hurts a lot, ya."

Jillian: "Ok, if your walker is the first thing you wouldn't want to worry about anymore, what would be the second thing?

Kelsey: "Mmm, I'm not sure, I really don't have to worry about that much stuff. Probably my wheelchair. Getting in and out of my wheelchair, sitting down too long and having my legs fall asleep, jamming my fingers in the spokes, breaking my nails and all that. So ya, I'd pick that."

Evident in both of the drawings Kelsey completed were her preferences for not wanting to worry about the accessibility of places, worry concerning the potential for physical injury from her wheelchair, and worry about emotional threats due to her needs for a wheelchair (see Appendices P and Q). As shown in Appendix P, Kelsey drew a picture of herself watching a hockey game and talked about enjoying the food, the cheering fans in the arena, and souvenirs to buy at the games. However, the drawing has only two tiny people on the ice playing hockey. She told me she drew the scene that way to depict what she doesn't like about sports. Specifically, from where she has to sit for accessible seating (a fair distance from ice-level), she can not see very well and it was too hard for her to draw that many miniature people. She went on to talk about the lack of accessibility of the arena in relation to the elevators and bathroom stalls as physically limiting factors in the arena. These are physical barriers that made it difficult for her to enjoy the overall experience from her wheelchair. Then, in Appendix Q, Kelsey drew a picture of herself skating, which is an activity she has never been able to do because of her personal physical limitations. Her wheelchair and walker are nowhere to be found in the picture and after she discussed the title she gave the drawing, "A Great Moment", it

was apparent to me that her great moment was one she had created purposely without her wheelchair or walker.

The meaning and significance of sport and physical activity in Kelsey's life. Kelsey values her family very much, and spends most of her free time with them. Between being with her family, going to places like the mall and to restaurants with her friends, and attending two specialized activity programs, she has little other time to devote to anything else. Because of the predominance of Kelsey's family in her interviews with me, her friends have played a background, albeit still important role. Considering Chawla's (1992) place attachment via social affiliation qualifier, it would seem that Kelsey indeed has the available and needed social supports in her life to enjoy positive attachments to many of the places she experiences.

Considering the place of her physical education classes, Kelsey has had a largely negative experience which she attributes to negative attitudes toward her by her classmates, as well as the minimal adaptability made for her by her teacher. In that place, Kelsey described having a few friends who would sometimes play off to the side with her when the rest of the class was "crashing and banging around" during competitive games, but her friends could only play with her until they got in trouble for doing so by the teacher. A general lack of support and threats to her emotional and physical security by her classmates characterized Kelsey's experience in physical education class, and have left her with little desire to participate actively in that place at all.

Nevertheless, Kelsey has continued to be casually active in other places which she enjoys, namely a specialized activity program and in outdoor environments with her family. She has described the people of these places as helpful, fun, and knowledgeable

about her abilities and how she moves. In relation to the developmental needs Chawla (1992) has noted, Kelsey enjoys physical and emotional security, enjoyable social interactions, and also creative expression and opportunities for exploration in the places that she has positive attachments to.

In fact, Kelsey's experiences with outdoor places have been overwhelmingly positive despite the potential physical accessibility issues that any youth who uses a wheelchair and a walker might experience. Her experiences of outdoor places were particularly significant to her and her descriptions and feelings toward them were in stark contrast to those of her physical education classes. The outdoor places Kelsey described were wide open – a long beach, a farm acreage, miles of trails and green spaces in a ravine by her house. They were free of clutter, of busy, fast paced people, and of anxiety related to the possibility of her injuring herself. They had lots of room for her to maneuver and "make mistakes" if she needed to or wanted to without fear of reprimand or scrutiny by others.

So, while Kelsey's experiences in activity participation have been varied, she still enjoys being active in specific places of her choosing. However, physical activity is not a major priority for Kelsey because spending time with her family (who tend to do mostly leisurely activities together) fulfill many developmental needs and overshadow any desire to pursue activities outside of her regular routine and her family unit.

Tracey

Tracey is an eighteen year old girl with cerebral palsy who is involved in many sports and activities offered by her community. Despite her family's low income status, she is registered in an integrated swim program, an adapted weights and sport program, a

wheelchair track program and a social program sponsored by a provincial disability sport organization and has been to many summer camp and day camps throughout her life. Although Tracey seemingly leads a physically active life, her endurance and sport-specific abilities do not reflect the hours of activities she attends every week. As well, she is heavy for her age, requiring a wheelchair that is too wide for many doorframes.

Part of Tracey's added weight is due to diet. She loves junk food and consistently substitutes soft drinks for water, having as many as eight bottles of pop a day. However, when Tracey attends the programs she is registered in, she does not participate actively very often. Instead, she avoids doing the activities by wheeling around and talking to other participants, or if she is swimming she tends to stay in the shallow end where she can bob in the water and still appear to be participating. Her casual, or relatively inactive participation is her own choice and has nothing to do with whether the place is physically accessible or whether she has the supports she needs. Tracey enjoys the programs she is involved in because she has a chance to be around groups of accepting people, and she really enjoys the social environment. Tracey loves to gossip.

In all the activities and camps she attends, she has lots of friends whom she enjoys spending time with and chatting with from home on MSN once the camps have ended. She also has a few friends at school whom are like herself, in that they enjoy socializing and going to school dances. Unfortunately, the friends she does have at school are not in her home room class, and in the past, this has meant that they were also not in her physical education classes. At the time of our interview, Tracey had not taken physical education for five years but her experiences there were still clear in her mind. She started out with very positive experiences in Elementary physical education where her favorite

activities were duck-duck-goose and climbing the hanging ropes (see Appendix M). When she progressed to Junior High however, her experiences with gym class turned consistently more negative and the place environment of gym class shifted dramatically. Suddenly she found herself among a group of peers who were not helpful to her, and who made fun of her and called her mean names.

> "I just sat on the side just waiting for them to invite me, but they didn't even ask me to play with them. They just played by themselves, like alone, and I sat all by myself. So all I could do was sit there – looking at the ceiling the whole time. My classmates and my gym teacher…could have asked me if I wanted to try things. I could have said 'ya', but they didn't. The whole time. They just like, totally ignored me and left me, so I went back to class and did some work. They even closed and locked the door on me. I didn't like gym 'cause I felt kind of left out when they did that to me. Like I wanted to join them and they just didn't want me…. They just think I can't do stuff, but I can do. Just 'cause they're standing and I'm in a wheelchair, like, doesn't matter. I still can have fun with my friends. Doesn't matter if you're standing or in a wheelchair. I know I can't stand up. I just like, don't get mad, I just like, tell them: 'I'm in a wheelchair. Ya. You wanna watch me climb?' They were amazed at how much I could climb…. Just, if you want to hang around with me and do stuff with me, good – I want to be your friend. But I don't like it when people say 'you can't do stuff'. Just try. I just try and try. I can get even better…. They weren't trying to watch me, they were just making fun of me. They used to call me names in gym class that I didn't like. They used to be like: 'look at the…' I don't know what they actually said but it hurt my feelings. I didn't say anything. And just for the rest of the school time they just tried to ignore me and did gym class all by themselves. Did their work, just totally ignored me. I just backed away from them and that was it. Sometimes it was just like, not fun. Not fun back then."

Like Tracey, a group of youths with disabilities in a study by Hutzler et al. (2002), also faced similar challenges in physical education when they were teased and ridiculed by other children. After hearing Tracey's story about gym, I asked her what she would change about her class if she could change anything, to which she replied:

> "Um, them trying to help me more often and just not walking away from me as often. Just… try to help me. If they wanted to ask me again, they'd just say: 'wanna try again?' and just 'if you can't do it, just try your best'…. Ya, and I wish they could be 'there often and just watch me, and clap for me instead of just walking away and just doing stuff on their own. I wish they could just help me and be there when I need them. And just say: 'good job', 'well done', 'you did good'. Ya I wish I could change that back then."

Being teased and excluded from physical education class left Tracey feeling frustrated in physical education, and the effects of that experience have caused Tracey to feel emotionally insecure outside of physical education class as well. If security is compromised, youths face barriers in being able to develop positive place attachments according to Chawla (1992). For example, when Tracey attended a National summer camp, she really enjoyed many social and interpersonal components of the camp. Below is a collection of Tracey's thoughts about a National camp that we both co-incidentally attended (in the summer before I interviewed her) where 75 other youths with disabilities from all over Canada also attended:

Of all the places I like to be active, that camp was my favorite! There was so much fun stuff for us to do – sailing, swimming, and tons of new stuff. And it was so inspiring! Like, there were lots of people just doing stuff and I went like: "WOW!" I was amazed about the other kids…especially when they were on the climbing wall! They were just like, climbing and climbing, and I couldn't believe it. I was like: "that's pretty cool!" At first, I couldn't go on the wall because my stomach didn't want to go. But then

once I got started…man, I was up there! Everyone was just up there. We just forgot our disabilities. And then after the camp, we all still talked to each other on that chat room made for the camp! It was awesome, just talking to people too, remembering all about the camp. That camp was my favorite. Someday I'd like to go back and be a camp councilor for all the kids...

Although Tracey largely enjoyed the camp, part of the camp was designed to have the youths make personal goals that they could share with their camp group leaders and pod-mates. This activity was one that evoked considerable anxiety for Tracey because she didn't feel emotionally secure (Chawla, 1992):

Tracey: "…I liked everything else about the camp, but I just didn't like talking about our personal goals."

Jillian: "You didn't like talking about your personal goals?"

Tracey: "Ya, I like to talk about myself, that's ok, but not my personal goals"

Jillian: "Oh. How come you didn't like that?"

Tracey: "Um, ya, there was just too many people around and I just didn't want them to listen to my personal stuff.

Jillian: "Hmm. Ok, so if you told them about your personal goals, what would you worry about them knowing?"

Tracey: "Uh, um, I was worried that they were just going to laugh at me and say: 'you're not good at this.' Like, I'm in a wheelchair. They're not. Look at them, they can do stuff I can't do, and I can do stuff they can't do…. I just didn't want to tell them 'cause it felt uncomfortable.

Tracey often expressed discomfort when she perceived situations to be evaluative, as in her physical education class, or when she had to share personal information with people she wasn't yet sure she could trust from camp. Another environmental component of places Tracey didn't particularly like was competition. Tracey's dislike for competitive situations is interesting because she gives the impression that she likes being a

competitive person. She told me stories about how people at her school have tried to have "dance competitions" with her but that she just wheeled away from them because she knew inside she was better than they were.

In her swimming drawing (Appendix I), Tracey described herself as being "the fastest racer girl ever". This statement over-exaggerates her abilities but is an idealistic dream that placed her in the winner's circle of the competition she made up which included other participants from the specialized program at the Centre. The following paragraph is an interpreted compilation of many of the stories Tracey shared about what it meant to go swimming for her.

Swimming is the best sport ever! There are so many things I like about swimming! Like, it is good exercise. It is good. And the water feels so nice when you're in it – especially when it's nice and warm! I go swimming on Saturday mornings…I'm trying to be a faster swimmer and the volunteers there help me. I like the volunteers that are there. They teach us good work in the swimming lessons that we do, like back crawl, butterfly – but I don't like doing the butterfly even though I am good at it. You should see my butterfly! I can do it faster now and do it without stopping. I'm fast like 'peseou'! 'peseou'! 'peseou'! (sound effects). Everybody last week was amazed! Their jaws just went: "how can she do that so fast?" and I was just like, "ya". Ya, I can do it really well, but what I also want is to be in a swimming competition and for me to be the fastest. But I would want you guys – well other people – to be fast too. If I could add to my drawing now, I would add all of you guys, one by one, just following me in the water. Everyone the same as me, right behind me. All in a big swimming chain, so we could show everyone how fast we can go and be superstars!

In addition to suggesting enjoyment for dominating competitive situations in swimming, Tracey also stated that she liked doing "survivor challenge stuff" with her bunk friends at camp where she was on a team and competed against other cabins in

athletic activities. Having an appreciation for team dynamics, feeling socially accepted, and developing a competitive spirit have been noted benefits to youths with disabilities by Kozub and Porretta (1996). The components of competitive activities noted by Kozub and Porretta (1996) were all elements that Tracey suggested she enjoyed.

However, an important caveat is that Tracey likes competitive situations in which she can control the outcome and can safely assume a spot that portrays her competence at the task. Situations in which she is at the mercy of competition by others, such as in her physical education class or in some specialized activities, have resulted in lack of enjoyment on her part. To illustrate, I have included a short excerpt from her second interview below in which she highlighted for me that she likes when she is successful in competitive situations with other people, but does not like it when other people are competitive with her in return:

Jillian: "So from the sports and activities you do, what do you think is the worst part? What do you not like the most about playing sports?"

Tracey: "Um, trying to get the ball from the other team's players"

Jillian: "You don't like that, huh?"

Tracey: "Um-hmm. Like, I was just trying to just, trying to take the ball and people take the ball from me and we're just fighting for the ball. I don't like that....Ya. I'm just like: 'Here! Have the ball!' Give them the ball and when I scored they'd get really mad at me. It isn't worth it to be mad, just try hard, and I say good luck to them and just encourage them to try their best and if they need help – just ask me 'cause I'm a pro."

Several times throughout her interviews with me, Tracey repeatedly verbalized "try your best", "try my best" and "I'm a pro". These types of statements have been referred to by Hutzler et al. (2002) as ego-defending mechanisms and are likely an

attempt for Tracey to control her emotions in situations where she is cognizant that her abilities do not match those of her peer group within the same task. It is not until competitive situations outside of Tracey's control test her abilities and she fares poorly that she resorts to being frustrated. Negative emotions arise regardless of the effort she feels she has devoted in "trying her best".

The meaning and significance of physical activity in Tracey's life. Places affording opportunities for sport and physical activity have been received both positively and negatively for Tracey. In terms of her physical education classes, Elementary school was a positive experience where the environment of the place was physically inclusive and socially accepting. Junior High physical education was perceived as considerably more negative however, as Tracey was taunted by her classmates, teased about her sport skills, and physically excluded from many of the activities her class participated in. In her Junior High physical education class, Tracey lacked need fulfillment of social affiliation, emotional security, and creative expression which Chawla (1992) suggests are necessary in order for youths to develop positive place attachments.

Tracey's less than optimal experiences in her school gym class have not discouraged her from being involved with numerous extra-curricular activities and sports. Happily, she has had more positive experiences with the many integrated and specialized activities that she participates in. The sheer number of clubs and organizations she attends speaks to the perceived importance they have in her life. However, as noted previously, Tracey is most interested in these activities for social reasons and because they provide places for her to feel emotionally secure. She told me that she enjoys the extra programs she attends because she gets a chance to talk to other kids and hang out with the staff. In

other words, the program places afford a social opportunity for her. She also likes that the volunteers at those programs are very helpful and encouraging of her abilities; they help Tracey to feel secure in her efforts and abilities.

Specialized outdoor places like camps and youth retreats have been a positive experience for Tracey as well. Her positive association with these places is likely due to the interconnected parts that comprised the camp experience, including other youths with disabilities to socialize with, new activities that were appropriately modified to ensure her successful participation, emotionally safe forms of friendly competition between cabins, and the opportunity for Tracey to learn about herself and her abilities in activities guided by enthusiastic trained volunteers who knew how to help her.

Overall, specialized activity organizations and inclusive community programs have helped to supplement Tracey's desires for social interaction, personal security, and emotional security that she had not gained through her participation in school physical education. The programs she attends play a vital role in ensuring her development of positive place attachments. The spin-off benefits of sport and activities have been the primary appeal to Tracey, and happily, when she perceives a need to become physically active or to work on her fitness she will already have the support network in place!

CHAPTER 6

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this research project was to learn how physical activity, sports and exercise were experienced by five youths with disabilities who I had opportunity to instruct at an adapted physical activity and weight training program. While gaining an appreciation for their life experiences, I learned the meaning and significance of physical activity, sports and exercise in the lives of each of the five youths.

I learned about the youths' experiences from their perspectives and interpreted their stories through my own lenses as a concerned researcher, friend, instructor, and advocate for the many benefits of physical activity, recreation, leisure and exercise. I ultimately aimed to further my own pre-understandings of the youths' experiences in places affording physical activity. To this effect, the youths' perceptions in concert with my own, were greatly valued as a means to better understand the unique culture of youths with disabilities (Adamson, 2004; Fine & Sandstrom, 1988). However, I recognize that the importance of these places in the youths' lives are most fully apparent to the youths themselves, as they are the creators of meaning for particular places and also are the interacting agents who have developed attachments to the places in their everyday lives (Chawla, 1992; Herbert & Bressan, 1995; Smith et al., 1998).

The following chapter is intended as a general overview of the findings in relation to the four topical areas mentioned by the youths: specialized activity programs, school physical education, swimming, and outdoor places. This summary will also include a consideration of recent literature pertaining to place, physical activity, and adolescents

with and without disabilities in order to identify gaps in the current available research and highlight opportunities for future research.

Summary of the Topical Areas and Implications of the Findings

Swimming. Swimming pools were experienced as significant places for four of the youths in this project; Alicia, Tracey and Amanda attached positive meanings to the place and James was a vivid example of how the experience of going to a swimming pool was associated as a negative place.

Starting with the Alicia, meaning associated with the swimming pool included a feeling of being "free". Free from the pressures and busyness of daily life, free from mobility limitations, and a sense of freedom from her crutches (and perhaps disability implied). Swimming gave Alicia a chance to be alone; a possible gesture toward her desire for a place of retreat (Clark & Uzzell, 2002; Korpela, Kytta, & Hartig, 2002). It is also likely that the presence of buoyancy within the liquid place helped to minimize the personal recognition of Alicia's mobility limitations thereby fostering a feeling of freedom.

Amanda and Tracey also both spoke highly of their experiences with swimming. Like Alicia, Amanda also voiced an appreciation for the retreat swimming pools can provide suggesting that they "help to take away all the noises" of daily life and focus on the task of swimming. However, in the context of Amanda's life story, it seems likely that she also enjoyed swimming pools as a place where she was able challenge stereotypical views that society has tended to have of youths with disabilities (Lindstrom, 1992), where her passion for swimming has garnered a vision of becoming a Paralympic athlete. Similarly to Amanda, Tracey described her enjoyment for swimming pools as a

place where she can demonstrate her skills and build goals of becoming a progressively stronger swimmer. Very generally, a positive place attachment (Chawla, 1992) to the experience of swimming pools for these girls evolved as a byproduct of their own self-discovery within the bounds of the place. Swimming pools have seemingly afforded these self-identity opportunities for them.

In stark contrast to the positive experiences of the girls, James' experience with swimming pools was extremely negative and his near-drowning experience overshadowed any prior positive experiences related to swimming. The meaning he attached to swimming pools arose from his fear for physical and emotional security. Threats to personal security act as a barrier to developing positive place attachments according to Chawla (1992), and as James' experience was quite extreme he suggested no intention of trying to reverse the barrier and develop new meaning to the swimming pool as a place. The loss of security was not a choice he consciously made in the first place but was instead made for him by his classmates.

Specialized activity settings. A considerable body of research exists that highlights the benefits of specialized activity programs in meeting the needs of youths with all types of disabilities, and this research project is of no exception. In a review of the benefits of participating in Special Olympics (a sport organization devoted to individuals with intellectual disabilities), Weiss et al. (2003) noted that Special Olympics programs may effect change in the self concept and competency of participants; contribute to the physical fitness and psychological well-being of the participants; and enhance the self-esteem, confidence, independence and socialization of participants (Klein et al, 1993; Lancioni & O'Reilly, 1998; Songster, 1984). The findings related to

participation in specialized activity settings of this project are similar even though they concern youths with mobility impairments rather than intellectual disabilities.

All five youths have made encouraging place attachments with specialized activity programs including a wheelchair track program, an adapted weight training and sport program, an adapted bowling team, and specialized swim programs. The youths' descriptions of these programs provide remarkable support for the possibility of sport and activity places to provide opportunities for self-discovery and emotional security experienced through genuine social interaction (Kristen et al., 2002). Places of specialized activity were often characterized by the youths as places where they felt safe to be themselves, places where they enjoyed interacting with other youths with disabilities, and where the people of the place were understanding of their needs and available to provide help whenever it was needed. Experiencing specialized places as physically and emotionally safe, as places which afforded social affiliation, and places where the youths could experiment with different identities fostered positive place attachments to these places for the youths and fulfilled necessary developmental needs as suggested by Chawla (1992).

School physical education. The experience of school physical education has been a significant one for each of the youths in this project. Their experiences can not be generalized however, as each has experienced physical education class uniquely during defining points in their Elementary, Junior High and High School studies. Of importance to note is that although the youths did negatively experience many parts which made physical education class a place, their negative associations were not global and their

positive experiences and suggestions for making physical education a more inviting place for youths with disabilities will also be highlighted here.

To begin this portion of the discussion, the words of Carlson (1995) are very appropriate in positioning the potential for school physical education classes to provide positive place attachments for children and youths with disabilities:

> Any student apathy in physical education may seem surprising if one considers that the subject includes sports, games, and physical activities, all of which hold an important place in the lives of many children and adolescents. Further, unlike many subjects taught in school, physical education often includes a substantial component of active play, which, in its individual and social forms, holds a powerful attraction for young people (p. 467).

Considering this, findings which reveal that each and every one of the youths in this study have experienced alienation, substantive emotional distress, and out right physical exclusion from activities in physical education are disturbing. The findings are further alarming in light of research which has highlighted the lasting impact that negative experiences in physical education can have on youths with disabilities in many areas of their lives (Brittain, 2004).

In all five participants when physical education was perceived negatively, the youths believed that their teachers were inadequately prepared to adapt the class curriculum to suit their needs and abilities. Similar findings highlighting research on fleeting student-teacher relationships of youths with disabilities and the perceptions of youths labeled as "low skilled" have also been cited (Portman, 1995; Skar, 2003).

For many youths, the school setting has been a prime breeding ground for failure experiences (Stipek & Gralinski, 1991; Walling & Martinek, 1995). However, with required pre-certification training, multiple online and informational resources, and

access to adapted physical education practitioners to assist in the successful inclusion of students with disabilities in the physical education curriculum; the incidence of teachers who are ill-prepared to work with and interact with students with disabilities is staggering. Ellis (2002) has suggested that schools ought to be places that support belonging and afford space for creativity and growth. The physical education class as an intertwined place of the overall school ought to also support similar qualities rather than causing youths with disabilities to feel they are a bother for asking that activities be adapted to their abilities.

In defense of the multiple factors influencing the execution of lessons in a gymnasium on any given day however, gym teachers have not been noted as the sole source of disappointment amongst the youths with disabilities in this study. The people of the place, (the youths' classmates) have also been noted by the youths in this study as a hindrance to enjoyable participation in gym class. Negative attitudes toward their disabilities, name-calling and threats to physical and emotional security have been forwarded by the youths in this study while describing their class peers. In many cases where the youths experienced gym class as an unwelcoming place, the youths had their own ideas about how to make the experience better for them – a small caveat that gives credence to the need to listen to the voices of youths and learn from their expertise. Researchers have suggested the value in including the values and opinions of youths in the development of urban places (Clark & Uzzell, 2002; Kytta, 2002), and it only seems natural that we offer the same courtesy to youths with disabilities in creating opportunities to develop nurturing place attachments to active places.

As for positive experiences in gym class, Tracey, Amanda and Alicia were happy with their participation in physical education when accommodations were made for them to participate inclusively with their classmates and when the place afforded social interaction between both the youths and their aides and the youths with their class peers. As well, these girls also suggested that when their teacher and classmates knew about their disability and knew how to help them when they needed it, the place was experienced positively. Similar findings have been noted by other researchers who examined conceptions of help in physical education by students with disabilities (e.g. Goodwin, 2001).

Outdoor places. All of the youths in this study expressed place attachments (Chawla, 1992) with outdoor places, whether they were participating in a camp, visiting with family in a natural environment or passing the time with recess outdoors during school hours. However, the youths' experiences varied significantly and while their stories did indeed lend some support to previous research which has described youths with and without disabilities enjoying the great outdoors (Chawla, 2002; Derr, 2002; Kristen et al., 2002), their apparent *need* for these places was less clear (Chawla, 1992; Korpela, 1992).

Limited physical accessibility to outdoor places was only a salient topic to a few of the youths in this study. Receipt of this information is interesting considering that one might expect for the youths to report outdoor places as having considerably more difficult terrain than an indoor physical education class or public recreation venue of which the youths shared plenty of feedback. An important question to ponder is whether the relative lack of verbalized accessibility issues for outdoor places is due to the relative number of

experiences the youths have had with outdoor places in comparison to the hours they have spent in physical education class and public places.

Future Research

The holistic experiences of places in the everyday lives of youths with disabilities have scarcely been examined, and while this project has shed some insight on the experience of active places for youths with disabilities, a number of additional questions and noteworthy issues have also arisen as a result of this work. Specifically, a number of future research endeavors involving youths with disabilities and the places in their lives have been identified based on the findings from this study in comparison to other research on youths with and without disabilities.

Rasmussen (2004) introduced the "institutional triangle" of places created for able-bodied youths. She also highlighted the possibility of "children's places" – those places within the route between each place in the institutional triangle which children often create for themselves. Children's places may be (but are not limited to) play places in their surrounding landscapes, or public places that children call their own even though they had not been specifically designed as a children's place; such as a picnic table, a set of stairs, or tree for climbing. While this study did lend itself to the possible expansion of the triangle to include 'medicinal institutions' when considering youths with disabilities (see Literature Review), "youths' places" to these youths were less obvious. Where are the places of youths with disabilities? What do these places look like for youths with disabilities, and what role do they play in their overall life picture?

Several researchers have noted an array of "adolescent places" when studying an able-bodied population which have included: malls, skateboard parks, green spaces close

to the home, streets or paved surfaces, and restaurants to name a few (Chawla, 1992; 2002; Clark & Uzzell, 2002; Korpela, 1992). How do these places fare in the eyes of youths with disabilities? Where might *they* identify as "adolescent places"? Skar (2003) and others have suggested that fewer opportunities for socialization characterize the experiences of youths with disabilities due to a number of contributing factors and may in turn affect their participation in places typically associated with teen culture. If this is true, how have youths with disabilities responded? What are their insights relating to their participation in places of typical teen culture? What are the meaningful places in their lives, and how do they experience them?

This study has identified that youths with disabilities may avidly participate in at least one valued avenue of teen culture: the electronic domain of email, MSN, and the use of internet chat rooms via the World Wide Web. The appropriation of virtual space by youths has increasingly occupied the attention of researchers in recent years (Bingham, Valentine et al., 1999; Valentine, 2000). For youths with disabilities, the internet potentially provides an environment where they can participate freely without personal mobility constraints or physical accessibility barriers. However further research is needed to clarify the meaning of internet places to youths with disabilities. Does the internet provide a place for valuable socialization experiences? Are internet places for youths with disabilities used in substitute to other places where they are not active players? Indeed, additional research is warranted.

As suggested by youths with and without disabilities in recent literature, outdoor environments can offer enjoyable experiences where youths are able to experiment with creative expression, experience the malleability of different environments, and use their

imaginations (Chawla, 2002; Derr, 2002; Ellis, 2004; Kristen et al., 2002; Kytta, 2002). The youths in this study have experienced outdoor environments both positively and negatively for a number of reasons, but interestingly, outdoor places were not nearly as salient to this group in comparison to the youths of previous research mentioned above. The apparent *need* for adolescents to experience outdoor places was unfortunately less eminent within this study (Chawla, 1992; Korpela, 1992). However, future research should continue to take an interest in the experiences of youths with disabilities in outdoor environments. Their perceptions are important for many individuals and professions including: outdoor program planners, school physical education teachers, city parks developers, recreation therapists, and adventure coaches, etc. as we continually strive to expand access to meaningful place experiences for youths with disabilities. The potential experiences that outdoor environments provide should in no way be discounted. Further work in this area is needed as relatively little is known about the experiences of youths with disabilities in outdoor places.

Overall, additional research projects aimed at understanding the various everyday places in the lives of youths with disabilities is needed. The experiences of youths with disabilities in places affording physical activity, have been shown to have lasting effects on their future personal psychosocial development (Brittain, 2004) and can also influence basic measures of their functional, musculoskeletal, and psychological health (Durstine, Painter, Franklin, Morgan, & Pitetti, 2000). In particular reference to the findings of the present study, it also seems that the developmental needs for places affording creative development and exploration, social affiliation, retreat, and security as previously identified for able-bodied youths (Chawla, 1992; Korpela, 1992), are also needs that are

relevant to youths with disabilities. Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that these developmental needs can be potentially satisfied when youths build attachments to places affording physical activity, recreation, leisure and sport. However, as each youth brings his or her own unique forestructure to any place affording physical activity, the importance of fostering active experiences that meet the specific developmental needs of each youth (in light of each youth's holistic life experiences) must not be overlooked. In other words, while youths with and without disabilities seem to share similar developmental needs in relation to the places within their everyday lives, their reasons for seeking fulfillment of the needs may be quite unique to each youth. Thus, it is paramount to approach the satisfaction of developmental needs associated with *places* for youths with disabilities at the level of the individual, while accounting for their unique personal history and life experiences.

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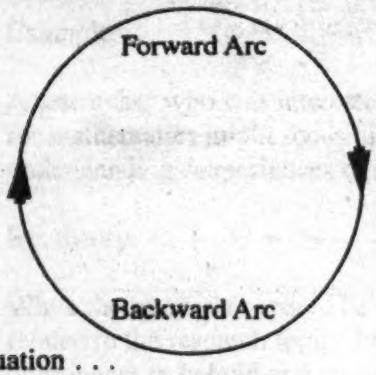
Appendix A

From Ellis (1998, p.27)

Figure 2: The Hermeneutic Circle

Projection . . .



Evaluation . . .

entails making sense of a research participant, situation, or a set of data by drawing on one's forestructure, which is the current product of one's autobiography (beliefs, values, interests, interpretive frameworks) and one's relationship to the question or problem (pre-understandings and concerned engagement).

entails endeavoring to see what went unseen in the initial interpretation resulting from projection. The data are re-examined for contradictions, gaps, omissions, or confirmations of the initial interpretation. Alternate interpretive frameworks are purposefully searched for and "tried on."

Appendix B

Parent/Guardian Information Letter

Dear Parents or Guardians:

This letter is to inform you about a study I am conducting at the University of Alberta (titled: **The lived experience of youth with disabilities in physical activity and sport settings**). My name is Jillian Sawler and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation. The study will be supervised by my academic advisor, Dr. Janice Causgrove Dunn, and is supported by the Steadward Centre for Personal and Physical Achievement, and the Alberta Cerebral Palsy Sports Association. The information gathered in this study will be used to write a graduate thesis paper, and may be published in a journal related to adapted physical activity, or presented at a related conference in the future.

Background and Purpose

It has been suggested that involvement in sport and physical activities provide opportunities for youth with disabilities to develop skills, and to learn and value themselves. However, we don't know very much about how or if this happens. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to learn (1) the meaning of physical activity, sports and exercise in the lives of youth with disabilities; and (2) what it is like for youth with disabilities to experience physical activity, sports and exercise. For example, do sports and exercise offer youths with disabilities opportunities to know and value themselves as individuals? Does their participation give them a chance to take risks and learn from their experiences? What is the significance of physical activity, sports and exercise in the context of the rest of their life experience?

What Will the Study Involve?

If you and your child are willing to participate, you will both be asked to attend an short information session at the University of Alberta Steadward Centre so that I can provide further information about the study and answer any questions you or your child may have. It will be held immediately after one of the Youth Activation sessions last no more than 20 minutes. Your child will also be asked to draw two pictures, and to attend three separate meetings with me. The meetings will be held at the Steadward Centre. Each meeting is expected to take about forty-five minutes, for a total time commitment of roughly two-and-a-half hours. The meetings will be audio taped so that I can study them at a later date.

The first meeting is intended to help me get to know your child in general, and to give them the chance to tell me about the drawings he or she made. In the second meeting, I will ask your child about his or her experiences with physical activity and sports. I am interested in experiences at school (during gym class, recess, and intramurals, for example) and out of school (their participation in after school, evening and weekend sports programs). The last meeting is set aside as a time where I can check to make sure I have correctly heard and understood what your child has told me in the previous two meetings. I may ask your child to clarify anything I haven't quite understood. Based on

Appendix D

Youth Information Letter
(Re: The lived experience of youth with disabilities in physical activity and sport settings)

Dear Youth Activation Participant:

My name is Jillian Sawler, and I am a student at the University of Alberta. I want to invite you to participate in a study that I am doing to learn more about what sorts of things youths with disabilities like and dislike, as well as what sorts of things are important to them. I also want to know about how youths with disabilities feel about playing sports and doing exercises. I want to know what gym class, intramurals, recess, and other sport programs outside of school are like for youths with disabilities so that I can understand what they get out of their involvement.

What will you be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, I will first ask you to make two drawings that you will take home with you and bring back the next week. Then, I will ask you to meet me at the University to talk with me. We will meet three times for about forty-five minutes each time. The first time we meet, you will get a chance to tell me about the kinds of things you do everyday, and talk about some things you like to do. I will also ask you to tell me about the drawings you made. The second time we meet, I will ask you some questions about what sports and physical activities are like for you. The third meeting is just so I can make sure that I understand everything you told me during the first two meetings. I will use a tape recorder to tape our talks, so that I can remember everything we say and write it down later. If you are willing to take part, you may also be asked to talk with me some more at a later date. But, you don't have to agree to talk to me more later if you are only willing to take part in this study.

Why might I want to do this?
You will get the opportunity to share your experiences and favorite activities with an interested and caring adult. Also, with your participation, the information from this study will help teachers, coaches, parents, and other researchers to understand what physical activity and sport experiences can be like for youth with disabilities.

Will being in the study hurt?
There are no health risks. At any time during our meetings, if you don't want to talk about something I ask about, you don't have to answer. Just say "pass" and we will talk about something else.

How many people will know about it?
The tapes and notes from our meetings will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and will be labeled in a way that will not identify your name or personal information in any way. I will be writing out what we say on the tapes, but I will not use your name. I will not identify you or give out any personal information about you in any presentations or

Appendix F

Drawing Activity Instruction Sheet (Page 1 of 2)

Hi everyone!

This sheet is a little reminder of your creative activity for the week. Please choose **two** activities from the options on the next page to complete for next week.

You are welcome to use the blank paper in this folder to draw on if you like, but you can use any arts and craft materials you can think of if they will help you! Use markers, pens, pencils, crayons, colored pencils, paints, construction paper, felt … anything you want!

Remember: there is no wrong way to do this - any way you choose is the right way!

Have fun and be as creative as you like! Remember to bring your folders with your drawings to the program next week - see you then! Have a great week! ☺

Drawing Activity Instruction Sheet (Page 2 of 2)

Activities: (Please choose **two**)

1.) Draw a picture that shows what things were like for you **before** you were involved in physical activity, and what things are now like for you **after** you've been involved in physical activity. You can use two sheets to draw on if you like, or you can draw them both on the same page, separated in some way.

2.) Draw me a picture that shows me some things you really **like** about sports, and some things you really **don't like** about sports. You can use two sheets to draw on if you like, or you can draw them both on the same page, separated in some way.

3.) Draw me a picture to show me what your school gym class is like for you. If there is anything you wish you could change about the class, draw your change on the back of the page. Use words or labels on your drawing if they will help you to create your scene.

4.) Draw me a picture of yourself participating in a sport or physical activity that you would really like to be a part of, if you could do **anything** you dreamed of. Some ideas: (But don't feel that you have to use these! Be creative!) It can be a fictional sport or activity that you make up, or it can be a sport or activity that you have never tried before but would like to, or it can be a vision of yourself in a team position that you really like… **anything at all!**

Appendix G

Questions About Participant's Drawings - Adapted from Malchiodi (1998)

1. Tell me about what you have created?
2. What is happening in your drawing?
3. Who are the people in the picture? What are they like to you?
4. What is this a picture of? Can you tell me why chose to draw this?
5. What do you think the people in the picture are thinking at this moment?
6. If you gave your drawing a title, what would it be?
7. Looking at your drawing now, is there anything you wish you could change about it? Is there anything you wanted to include but were having a hard time drawing?
8. What was this activity like for you?

Appendix H

Individual Interview Guide Questions – Modified from Ellis (1998)

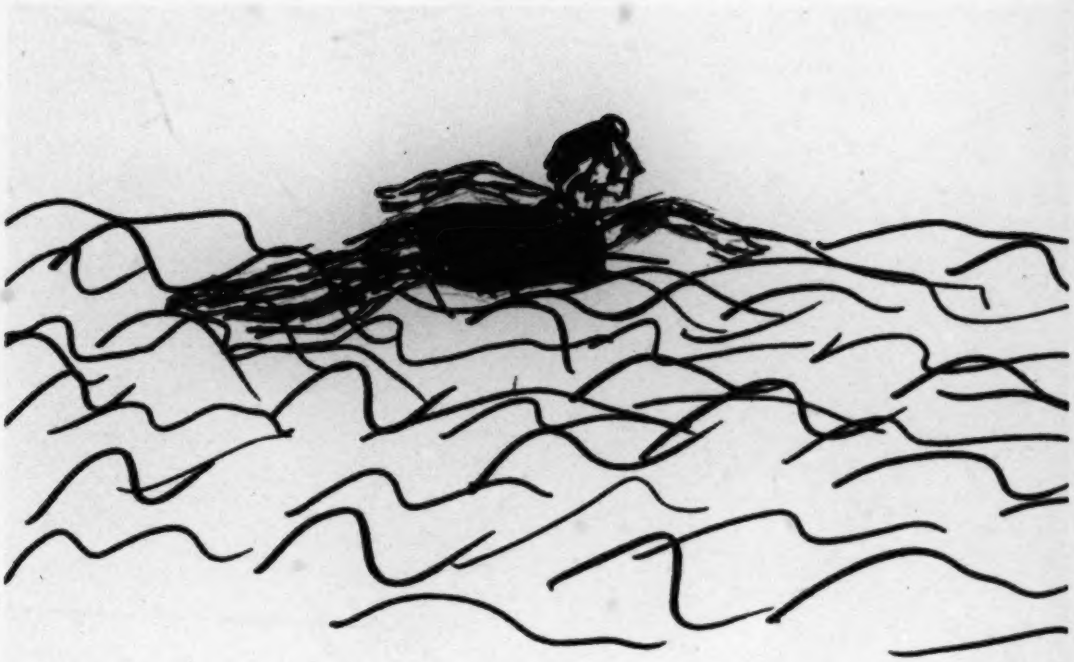
1. If you only had to go to school three days a week, what are some of the things you'd like to do with the extra time?
2. In a typical day for you, what is the best part of the day?
3. What is your least favorite part of the day?
4. What would you say is the best day of each week? What makes that day the best day for you?
5. Sometimes we day-dream about things we'd like to do, or things we'd like to try, or things we'd like to become. Can you remember anything you've ever day-dreamed about?
6. What sorts of things do you like to do in your free time?
7. Have you ever done anything really different from what most people your age have done, made something, read up on something, planned something, tried something?
8. Is there something you have always wanted to do but you haven't tried it yet?
9. Now I'm going to ask you some questions about how you see things… For example, who do you think makes the biggest difference to what happens in the classroom: the principal, the teacher, or the students?
10. What is the best thing about being your age? What is the hardest thing?
11. In the world of nature or in the world of things or in the world of people, what is it that surprises you the most or that you find most fascinating?
12. Who are your favorite people? (What makes them your favorite?)

13. Is there anyone you really look up to or think is a kind of hero that you would really like to be like? (Who are they and what do they say or do that makes you want to be like them?)
14. If you could pick one thing you wouldn't have to worry about anymore, what would it be? What would be the next thing?
15. What do you do when you need a really good idea?
16. Can you thing of anything that's a constant nuisance or that always annoys you? (What are some of the things you have tried to do about it?)
17. If you could pick between singing, painting, writing a letter, or reading, which would you pick? (What would you sing, paint, write or read about?)
18. If you could spend two weeks with someone who does a special kind of work, what kind of person would that be?
19. If you could be and do *anything* you wanted, what would you do? Why is that?
20. In the year ahead, what are some of the things you would like to accomplish or try for the first time?
21. Some kids really like sports a lot. Would you say that you do? Tell me why/why not?
22. What sports or activities do you really like to do? Tell me a little bit about why you like them…
23. Are there any sports that you kind of wish you could try but never had the chance yet?
24. What is the best part about playing sports or doing activities? What would you say is the worst part?

25. When people playing a sport disagree over something, why do you think that is?
26. Who are your favorite people to play sports and games with? Why is that?
27. When you first started coming to the program, was there anything that you really liked or didn't like about it? What? Is anything different now?
28. Do you take part in any teams or activities outside of school and our program? (What is that program like for you?)
29. Tell me about what recess is like for you? What do you like about recess? What don't you like about recess?
30. What about your gym class – what do you like about your gym class? What don't you like about your gym class?
31. If you could change three things about your gym class, what would they be?
32. Now I would like you to think about *all* the places that you play sports or are physically active… where would you say is your favorite place? What makes that place your favorite?
33. If you wanted to tell people what playing sports and being physically active is like for you, what would you tell them?

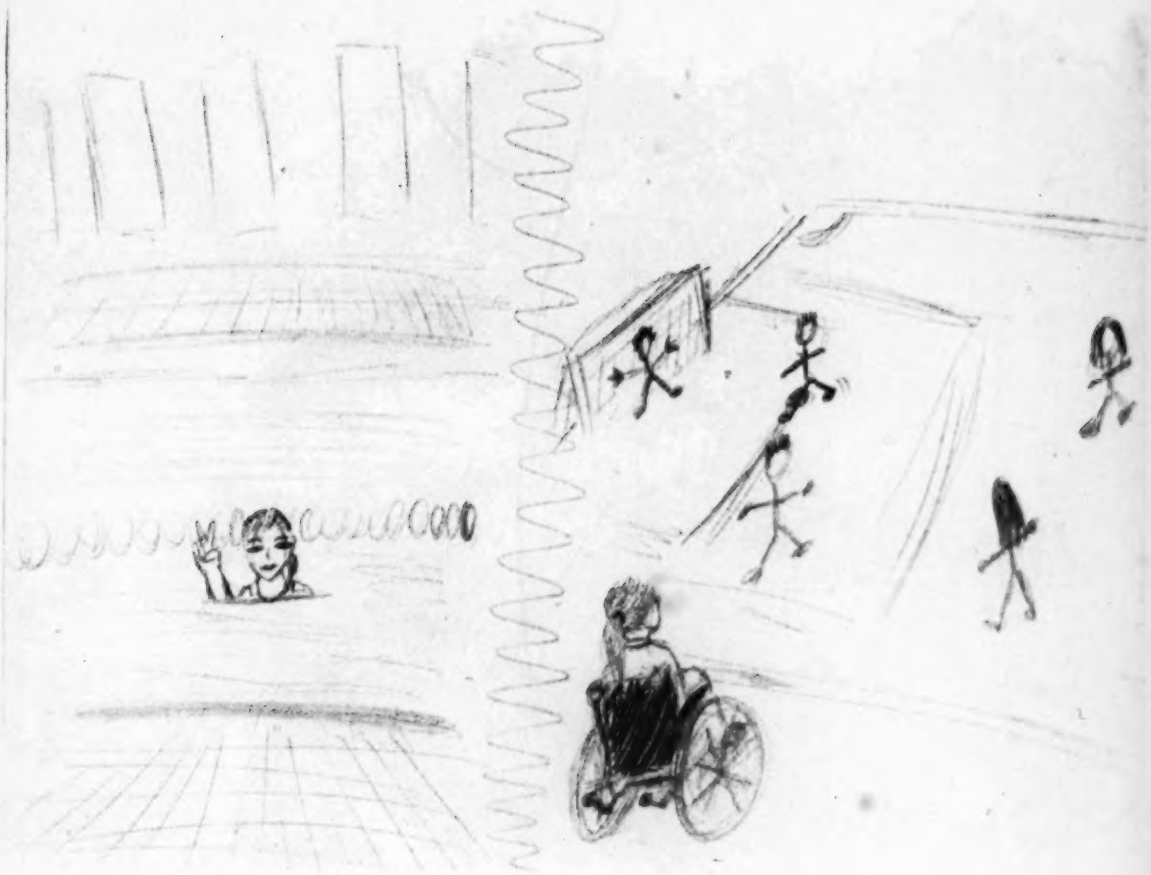
Appendix I – Tracey's Vision

"Tracey The Fastest Racer Girl Ever"



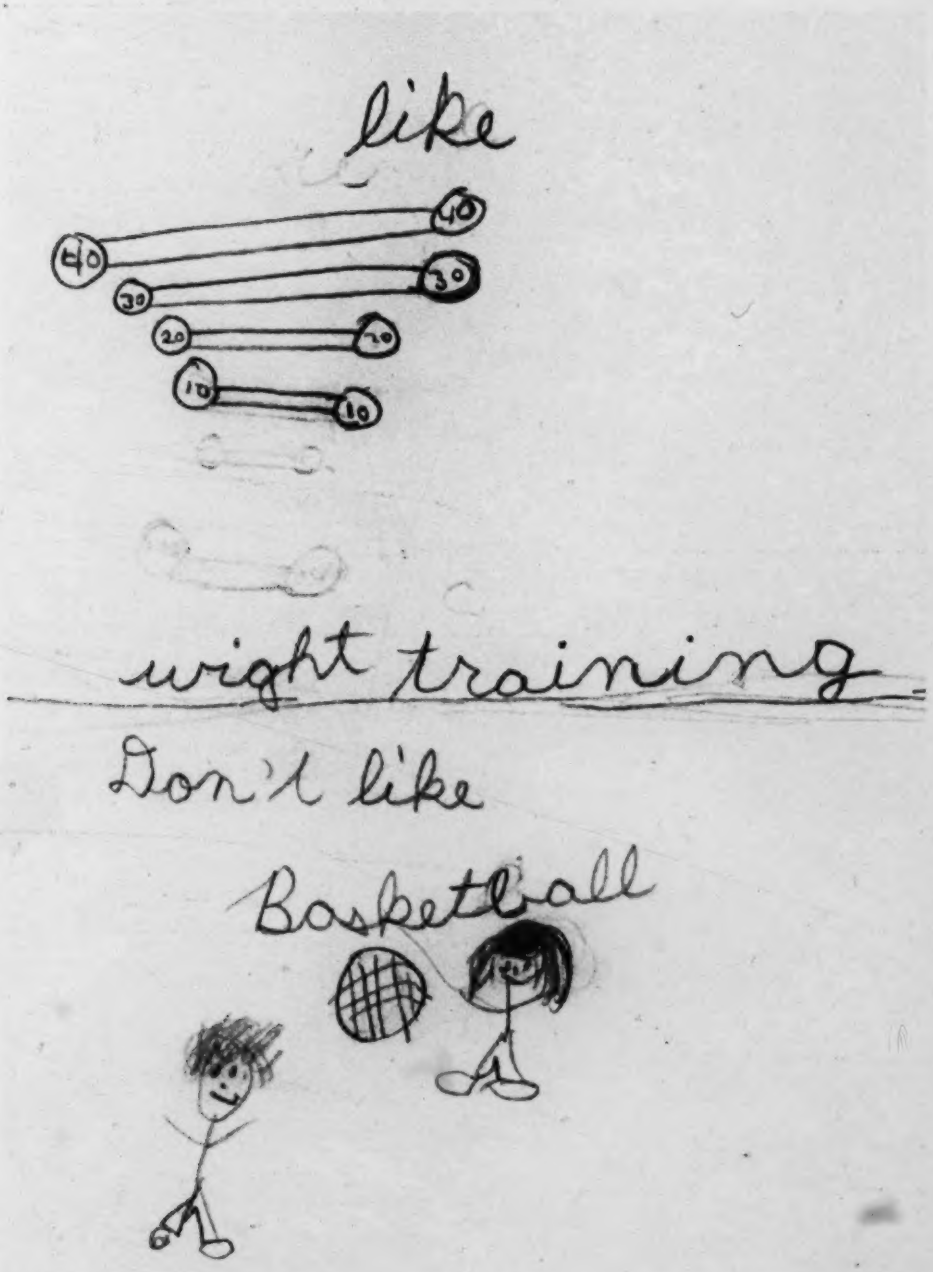
Appendix J – Things Alicia Likes and Doesn't Like About Sports

"Splash!" and "On the Sidelines"



Appendix K – Things Amanda Likes and Doesn't Like About Sports

"Weight Training is Fun, Weight Training is Good for People" and "Try to Make Basketball More Fun"



Appendix L – Amanda's Vision

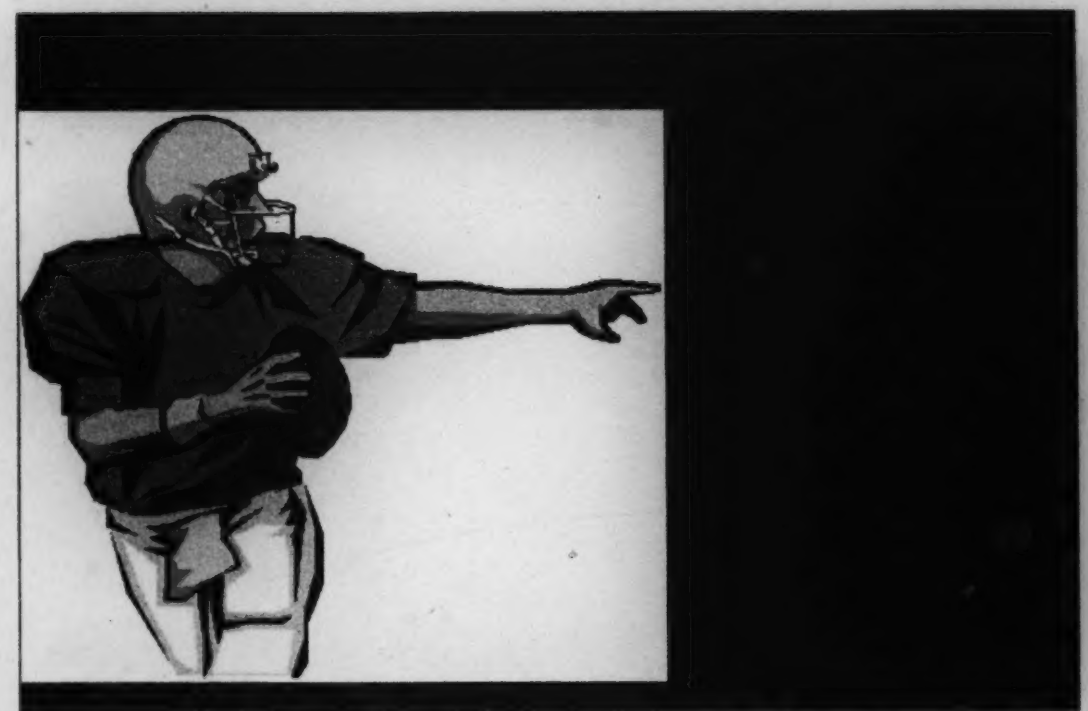
"Sports for the Disabled"

Appendix M – Tracey's School Gym Class

"Tracey the Strong Muscle Girl"

Appendix N – James' Vision

"Grey Cup Winners"



Appendix 0 – Alicia's Vision

"Gliding On Ice"

Appendix P – Things Kelsey Likes and Doesn't Like About Sports

"Me At a Great Game"

Me At A Game' I LIKE the fan, cheering, and the Scoreboard. I don't like [illegible]

Appendix Q – Kelsey's Vision

"A Great Moment"